

Towards a Regenerative Sustaining of Inhabited Milieus

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Faced with the criticality of living conditions – planetary limits, climate emergency, declining biodiversity, inequalities – the array of projects presented at European 18 marks a clear shift: turning nature as recurring birth into one of the fundamental issues in the transformation of inhabited milieus. This reconsidering the existing, but also the unstable, the uncertain, and the troubled, leads to new scenarios for sustaining (maintenance, gentle reactivation and/or evolution of milieus). Critical investigation of the rewarded projects highlights different strategies aimed at considering different types of natural regenerative sustainability in order to initiate restorative connections between environmental and social conditions vs. the unsustainable depletion of living milieus and people.

Regenerating means not only taking from the milieu, but even more giving back to it, as advocated by Michel Serres in *The Natural Contract*. This is to prevent humans from behaving like parasites that end up destroying their host, and to encourage humans to interact not from above or at the centre, but alongside and among others, reconsidering how everything interacts and co-evolves. This involves synergies and symbiosis between natural and anthropogenic dynamics, whether at the local, territorial or landscape levels, taking into account transversal multi-scale processes originating in living ecosystems. How can we combine the revival of the already-there with a new beginning?

Among the rewarded projects, five strategic lines of regenerative sustaining are particularly significant: new local naturo-cultural alliances; the renaturation of industrial and mobility infrastructures; the configuration of large symbiotic parks; the recreation of natural continuities across large territories; and regenerative prospects.

NEW LOCAL NATURO-CULTURAL ALLIANCES

While vernacular traditions saw human settlements establishing themselves based on the milieu's biomaterial conditions regarding the potential for subsistence, materials and know-how, a certain form of modernism has continually abstracted itself from this by taking distance from the local scale. However, a shift is taking place contributing to the promotion of a networked circular economy based on solidarity, in which renewable resources, recycling, reuse and subsistence are on the agenda, as is the involvement of local populations thanks to their multiple capacities to be active agents in their immediate environment, so that they do not suffer, but are stakeholders in a concern for sobriety and the limitation of deadly impacts.

On a naturally disordered and fragmented site, 'neither urban nor rural', runner-up project *Where the Wildflowers Grow* on the outskirts of Zagreb (HR) does not try to superimpose a new urbanity seen from above, but relies heavily on the already-there, particularly the



Fig. 1 – Zagreb (HR)
Runner-up
Where the Wildflowers Grow
→ See more p.402



Fig. 2 – Clermont-Ferrand (FR)
Runner-up
Space for All
→ See more p.296



Fig. 3 – Amersfoort-Kop van Isselt (NL)
Winner
Re:Isselt – Growing by Reuse
→ See more p.352



Fig. 4 – Eslöv (SE)
Runner-up
Between the Walls
→ See more p.86



Fig. 5 – Fumel (FR)
Winner
From Rust to Roots
→ See more p.32



Fig. 6 – Bregenz-Hard-
Fußach-Höchst (AT)
Winner
Recode the Road
→ See more p.146



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

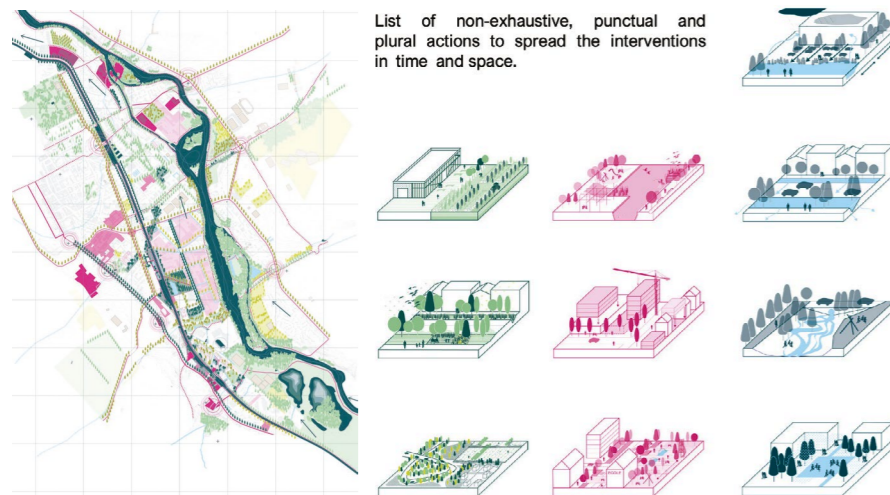


Fig. 8 – Grand Nancy (FR)
Runner-up
*The Ribbon, the Sponge
and the Willows*
→ See more p.372

presence of nature on the small scale. This allows the creation of ‘a network of local green interventions – mini parks, tree planting, etc. –’ to form a patchwork of gardens between the built fragments, using residual or unused plots. These gardens have a climatic role to play, in particular in preventing urban heat islands. This natural enhancement leads to new uses: ‘meeting points, small spaces for sharing and semi-collective socialising, equipped with basic facilities (barbecues, tool sheds, smokehouses, etc.)’, creating a constellation of vibrant mini-centres (fig. 1).

In a social housing neighbourhood in Clermont-Ferrand (FR), the *Space for All* runner-up project uses empty spaces between functionalist buildings to propose a network of six interconnected mini-parks. They are designed as large gardens based on a reappropriation of the land, which regains its living dynamic and takes on natural functions. This renaturation of open spaces is conceived as a ‘co-creation between living beings – humans and other-than-humans – and their milieus’, a project that ‘moves from control to caring’ (fig. 2).

Other projects are linked to this approach. In Amersfoort-Kop van Isselt (NL), winning project *Re:Isselt – Growing by Reuse* focuses on revegetation ‘from the project’s earliest stages, allowing landscapes to develop and mature alongside the built environment’ – a setting where the circular economy is not only practised but also experienced on a daily basis (fig. 3).

Runner-up project in Eslöv (SE), *Between the Walls*, also starts with the land and existing resources to promote the creation of micro-climates ‘with productive use of the soils and enhanced biodiversity between the walls and gables built using bioregional materials’ (fig. 4).

RENATURATION OF INFRASTRUCTURES, INDUSTRIAL SITES, AND MOBILITY, WATER AND ENERGY SUPPLY NETWORKS

Industrial wastelands, as well as numerous obsolete infrastructures and mobility spaces constitute a significant ‘heritage’ of opportunities in terms of material stocks and possible reuse, but also of memories. How can we

reinvest in these technical spaces by inventing interfaces with a reactivated natural environment, enabling revitalising hybridisations and favouring new uses, ecological/soft mobility, and water and energy supply?

Winning project in Fumel (FR), *From Rust to Roots*, is located in a valley which, in addition to an obsolete industrial heritage, is composed of ‘a mosaic of orchards, vineyards, groves and small villages’, which according to the authors are sustainable resources. The site, which has known intense mining activity, also offers opportunities by combining ‘the generosity of the land and the resilience of the communities’. On this basis, the project can reconsider the relationship with the landscape and design the link to the industrial heritage and memory, combining ‘the rich biodiversity and regenerative cycles of nature’ with the activation of new uses inside inherited spaces (fig. 5).

The Bregenz-Hard-Fußach-Höchst (AT) site is a transit route that becomes a ‘crisis line’ as it crosses territories where ‘river, lake, marsh and agricultural environments, rich in biodiversity and inhabited by plant and animal communities’ intersect, forming an ecological heritage between the Rhine delta and Lake Constance. Winning project *Recode the Road* considers the fragility and vulnerability created by these meeting points between the road and the edge landscapes as an opportunity to reconsider them as transit areas, creating smooth transitions and small-scale landscape continuities (fig. 6).

CONFIGURATION OF SYMBIOTIC INHABITED PARKS

Renewed configurations celebrate invigorating natural and social connections, which break down barriers and reveal biogeochemical and landscape reconnections with the great cycles of the elements (water, air, earth, fire), of the living things and of societal rhythms. Mutually beneficial symbiotic relationships are thus sought, tending to harmonise metamorphoses in peaceful relationships between artefacts and nature in perpetual flux, without underestimating the power of the wild nature.

In Polignano a Mare (IT) winning project *The Rewilding Grounds* aims to rebuild connections between natural and urban landscapes and ‘between the coastline and the agricultural hinterland’. To achieve this, it uses existing features to design three parks, integrating uses that form ‘a continuous green infrastructure’. The project combines several strategies: climate regeneration through a forestry programme creating an ecological corridor; and the reinforcement and revitalisation of public spaces to create attractive and connected urban hubs. Including varied itineraries along ‘tree-lined avenues, wooded areas and shaded spaces’ and open landscaped areas, the project aims to promote green tourism ‘to reduce seasonal dependence’ (fig. 7).

On a multi-site location along the Meurthe River in the Grand Nancy (FR) area, runner-up project *The Ribbon, the Sponge and the Willows* proposes to create a unified natural element – a ‘large circular river park’, the role of which is to ‘reconnect rural and urban areas’ through two natural entities, the Meurthe and Moselle rivers, by enhancing water resources. The park fits into its territory by ‘building on the geographical base’ and preparing for climate change (including slowing down and circulating water to reduce runoff and favour infiltration and storage, thereby preventing flooding). Based on this natural regeneration, the park ‘puts peri-urban areas into perspective’ at the south of the metropolis. Backed by the canal in particular, new uses are being created in a flexible and evolving manner.

Other projects are regenerating sites around a park (fig. 8).

The already largely wooded site in Blagnac (FR) offers the beginnings of a park landscape. Winning project *The Commons Laboratory* aims to reveal this park in several stages: requalifying the public spaces, and rediscovering lost links around soft mobility, water, living soils and the memory of the place. The buildings fit into a landscape grid. The existing monumental functionalist building ‘condenses a city system within a park that provides shelter for the living’ (fig. 9).

Based on the circular geometry of the arenas converted into an epicentre, winning

project *ALL-RING. Una plaza para todos.* in Getafe (ES) proposes ‘a system of rays forming a mosaic of landscapes: a thermodynamic infrastructure creating a microclimate, shaded areas thanks to the planting of large trees, water features and misting systems to reduce the ambient temperature’ (fig. 10).

(RE-)CREATION OF ECOLOGICAL CONTINUITIES ACROSS LARGE TERRITORIES

This category refers to transversal territorial guidelines for large-scale renaturation involving strategic geographical and societal data. These issues are correlated with external and/or internal evolutionary factors linked to levers and broad areas of the fabric of living milieus.

The challenge for the site along the River Nive (FR) is to repair the multiple discontinuities in the routes and to better connect the natural elements (river and agricultural landscape) with the social and tourist activities associated with them. Runner-up project *Entraide* achieves this goal on a territorial scale by creating new continuity in the route network to make the valley fully accessible ‘from the river to the land with junctions that reveal the link between water and the territory’. Three approaches enable this goal. The first is to ensure the protection of natural areas by drastically limiting human presence, allowing biodiversity to flourish. The second is to make access to the river easier ‘by promoting it as a common good’. And the third is to convert obsolete industrial buildings by giving them new educational, social and local material production uses. The converted buildings then serve as landmarks along the new continuous route connected to the river (fig. 11).

In Navalmoral de la Mata (ES) winning project *ACTION - REACTION* proposes renaturation to create natural systems and combat the fragmentation caused by infrastructures and urban development. The aim of the project is to restore natural continuity through ecological corridors that enhance biodiversity. Floodplains and retention basins are created based on the models of the ‘Sponge City’ and ‘Regenerative Urban Planning’. This allows human flows to re-establish and



Fig. 9 – Blagnac (FR)
Winner
The Commons Laboratory
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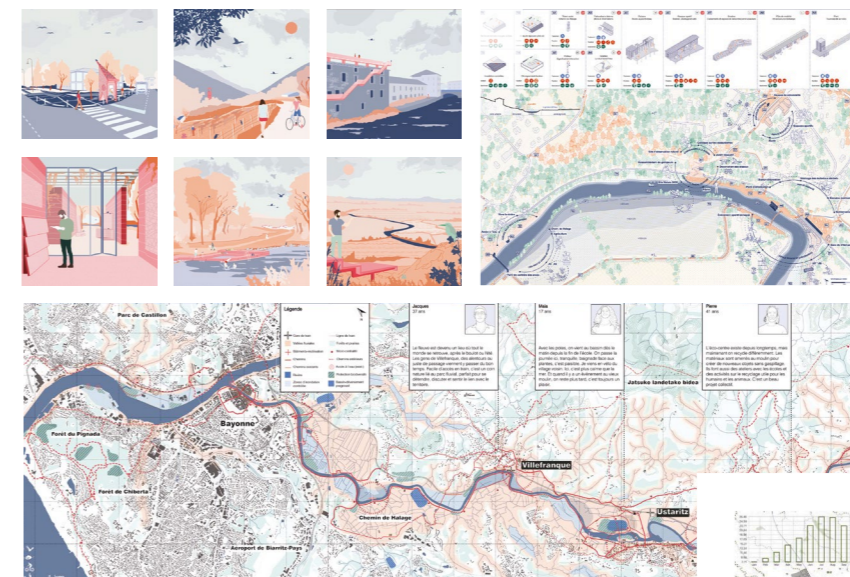


Fig. 10 – Getafe (ES)
Winner
ALL-RING. Una plaza para todos.
→ See more p.214

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



Fig. 12 – Navalmoral de la Mata (ES)
Winner
ACTION - REACTION
→ See more p.394





Fig. 13 – Santa Pola (ES)
Winner
Water's journey
→ See more p.176

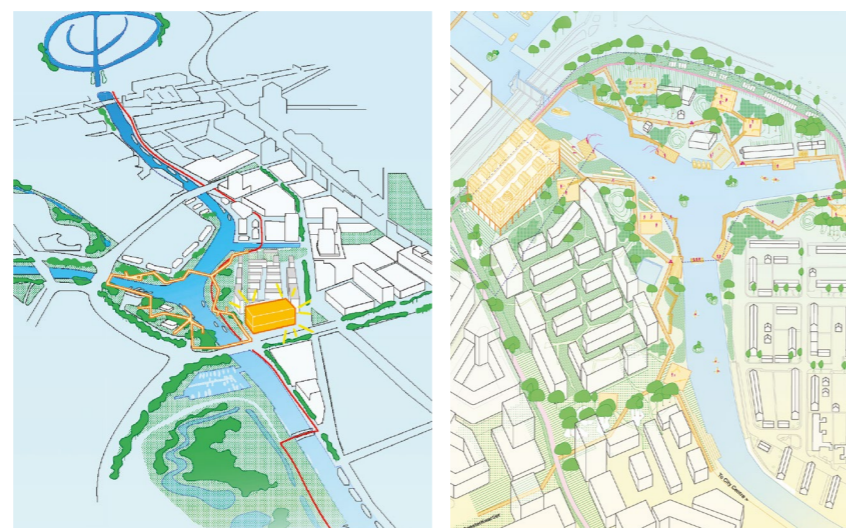


Fig. 14 – Amersfoort-
Koppelbrug (NL)
Runner-up
Assembly City
→ See more p.134

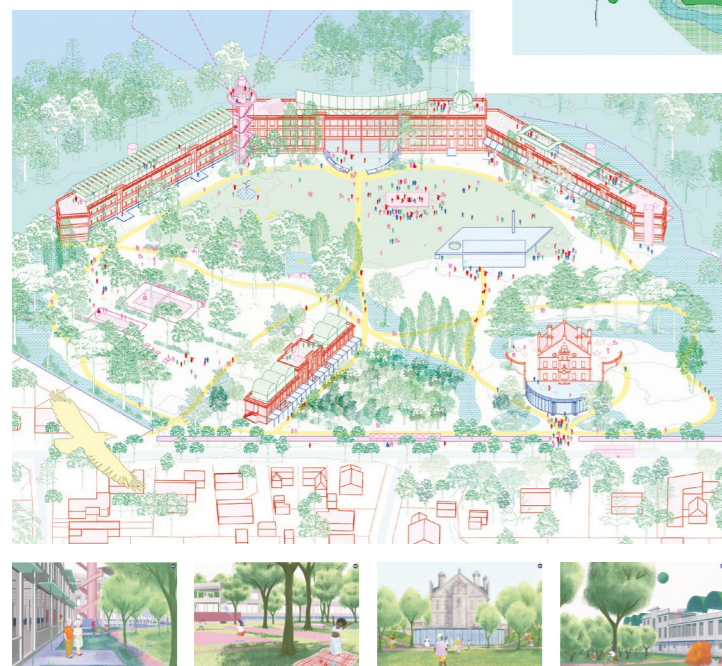


Fig. 15 – Jullouville (FR)
Runner-up
Le climatorium des possibles
→ See more p.40

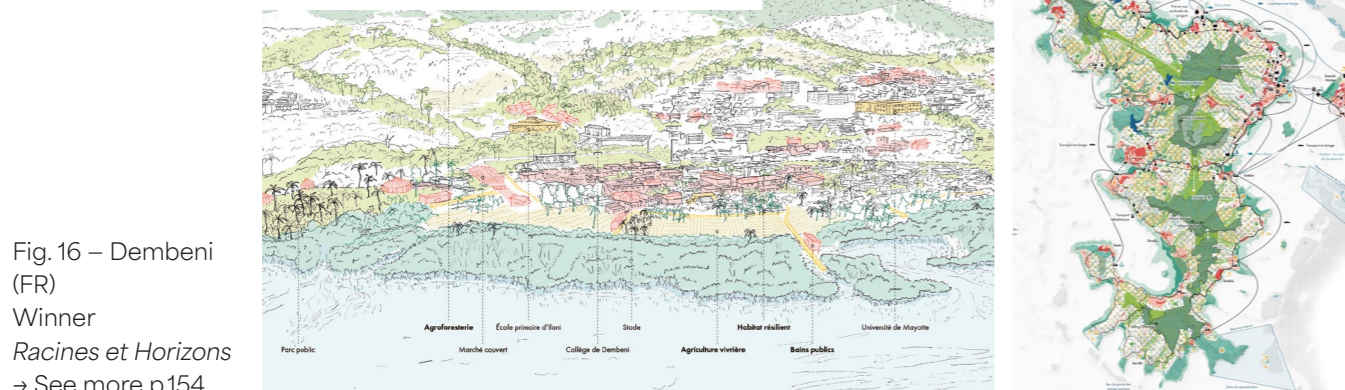


Fig. 16 – Dembeni (FR)
Winner
Racines et Horizons
→ See more p.154

unused spaces to be reactivated. The aim is to respond to environmental risks (heat waves, floods) while 'enriching urban life through accessible, resilient and multifunctional green spaces' (fig. 12).

Other sites require the restoration of natural territorial continuity.

In Santa Pola (ES), urbanisation has disrupted watercourses, ravines and sediments flown to the sea, causing ecological interruption and imbalances, particularly in water management, leading to flooding and periodic increases in heat. Winning project *Water's journey* proposes to create a natural water drainage system across the entire cape, forming a series of strategic transversal axes, reconnecting the mountain to the sea and the city to its environment. These green links reintroduce biodiversity and enhance urban spaces (fig. 13).

In Amersfoort-Koppelbrug (NL), runner-up project *Assembly City* is anchored in the regional network of green and blue spaces; the project 'extends the ecological corridor along the river, connecting the city to its surroundings' (fig. 14).

REGENERATIVE PROSPECTS

A category of complementary interventions engages in prospective scenarios that focus on open, evolving processes related to adaptation to climate change, hazards and associated risks for humans and other-than-humans. This leads to new ways of imagining the future of present and future generations.

Runner-up project in Jullouville (FR), *Le climatorium des possibles*, starts from the idea that the city is already – and will be even more so in the future – facing climate change, without the possibility to predict with certainty all the negative effects: flooding, sea submersion, heatwaves and drought. However, the topography of the site itself can turn it into 'a place of hospitality and regeneration between communities and living environments' in this environment. The project therefore aims to make the site 'an evolving prototype project' that prefigures a resilient territory adapted to the changing climate, centred around an inhabited vegetable garden, living and productive

roofs, an environmental observation tower, and 'sponge soils' to absorb excess water and prevent flooding. 'It is as much a research space as a constantly evolving living environment' (fig. 15).

In Mayotte, an archipelago in the Indian Ocean, the municipality of Dembeni (FR), where the mangrove landscape is being invaded by spontaneous housing, winning project *Racines et Horizons* is based on the observation that 'resources are becoming scarce and linear growth models are unsustainable'. The project's authors believe it is necessary to take time to rethink these models and to start promoting a circular economy adapted to this particular context by introducing reuse and resource efficiency through recycling, thereby limiting imports of materials. Taking into account 'the fundamental complexity of Mayotte, with the juxtaposition of legal and customary regimes', the project also proposes to rethink the governance model, focusing on experimentation with new methods of land management involving local communities (fig. 16).

CONCLUSION

During this investigation, it became clear to us that regenerative sustaining as presented above constitutes constellations that seek to take care of vulnerabilities and interdependencies by exploring approaches other than the nature vs. culture dualism or extractivist techno-solutionism. With a view to sobriety and limiting deadly impacts, the proposed weavings envisage new symbiotic and synergistic conditions. The processes mentioned above, although only briefly discussed in this article, reveal that they are part of the triple imperative of lasting, inheriting and starting over. This is achieved through other narratives and the sustaining of the creation of inhabited milieus, in search of sustainable, co-existential regenerative agreements. They are developed within a wide cultural diversity, but always in a situational and experiential manner. The challenge is, again and again, to hold on to the world and to bring together regenerative natural and cultural cohabitations.