

The New Normal for Elephants

By Julio de la Fuente (ES)

Architect, urban planner, co-founder of Gutiérrez-de la Fuente Arquitectos in Madrid (ES)
www.gutierrez-delafuente.com

A compilation of E18 rewarded proposals offers new readings of a multilayered heritage of derelict buildings – we call them *elephants* because of their big scale in comparison with their surroundings – embedded in our cities and villages. These *elephants* provide a valuable source for a larger urban or rural transformation, as shown in the Flint theatre in Amersfoort (NL), the Orange Campus in Blagnac (FR), the Winery Es Sindicat in Felanitx (ES), the bullring of Getafe (ES), La Malatería healthcare facility in Oviedo (ES) or the Entre-Lacs obsolete industrial buildings in Mantes-la-Jolie (FR).

The comparative analyses at European scale allow the transition from the local conditions to the common strategies, sharing visions on how to implement them. But which kind of strategies can infill new uses throughout time and reconnect these *elephants* with the territorial resources? And regarding the resources on-site, how can circular principles become the driver of a minimum-footprint reuse?

TIMELINESS FRAMEWORKS

On some sites, the goal is to offer credible uses for the future conversion of an obsolete building as an early stage of urban evolution. But this is not so evident nowadays with the political and economic atmosphere of uncertainty. There is an interesting trend in some of the proposals to manage these conditions, suggesting a concept of timeliness as an essential strategy for reusing.

In Amersfoort-Flint (NL), winning proposal *Reverse Structuralism* (fig. 1) is giving a new life to a theatre complex through a three-dimensional framework anchored to the structuralist concept of the original scheme. This super-grid is a permeable device to open-up the complex, inviting public space to colonise the former cultural building and giving room for future uses in an open-ended evolution: reusing, not as a finished product, but as a platform for action.

In Mantes-la-Jolie (FR) another kind of *elephant*, an industrial one, is located on a wasteland nestled between two lakes. Runner-up entry *LUEURS CONTAGIEUSES* (fig. 2) offers a long-term transformation process as a fantastic narrative of potential situations based on three different steps – incubations, contagions, disseminations – embracing the



Fig. 1 – Amersfoort-Flint (NL)
Winner
Reverse Structuralism
→ See more p.196

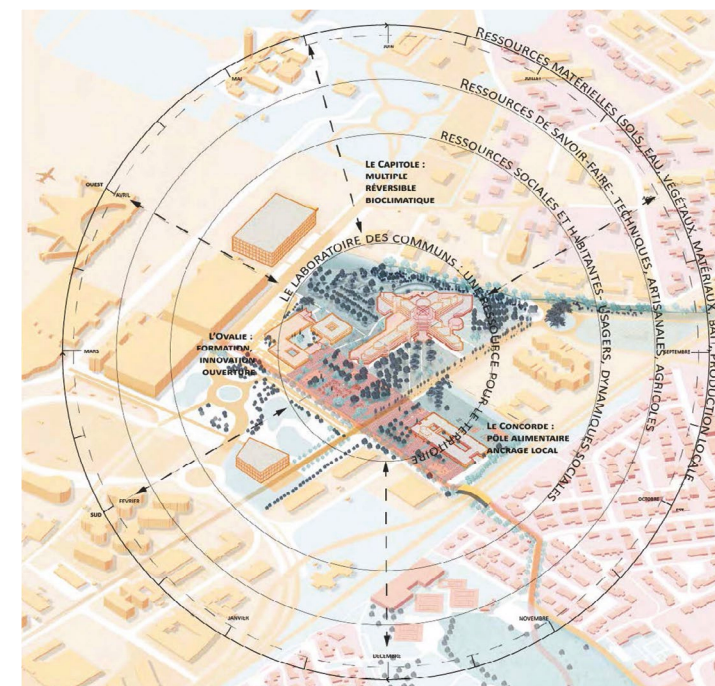
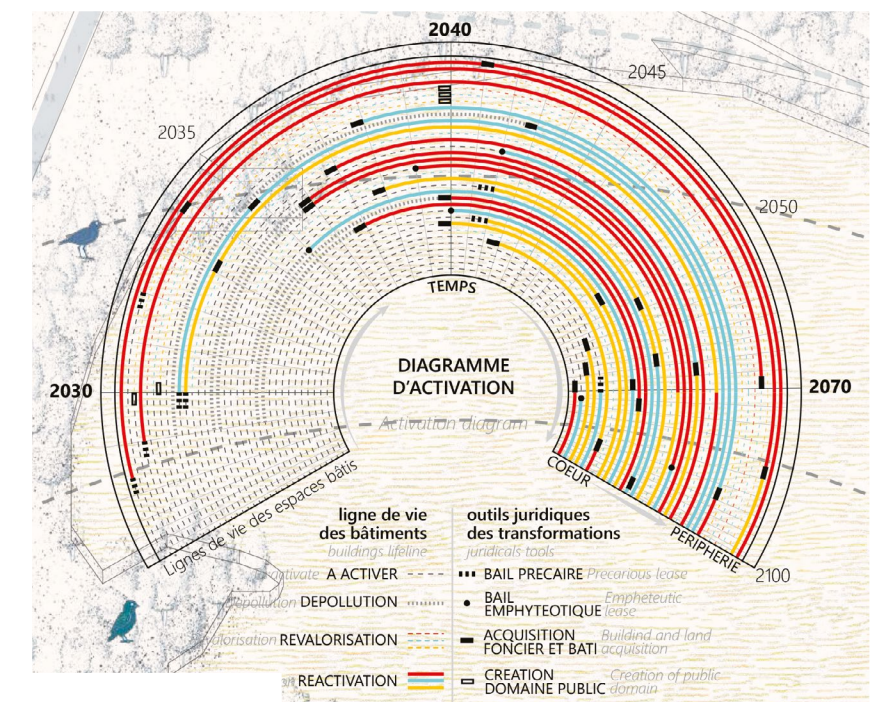


Fig. 2 – Mantes-la-Jolie (FR)
Runner-up
LUEURS CONTAGIEUSES
→ See more p.62

Fig. 3 – Blagnac (FR)
Winner
The Commons Laboratory
→ See more p.202

Fig. 4 – Felanitx-Es Sindicat (ES)
Winner
RE[V]URE ES SINDICAT
→ See more p.206

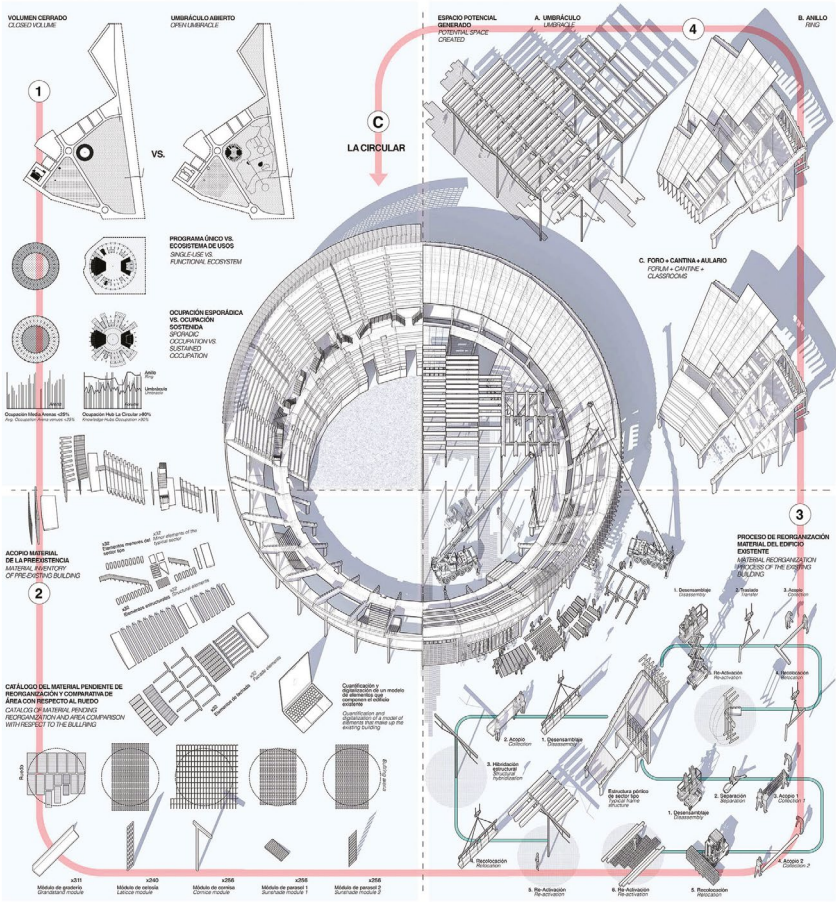
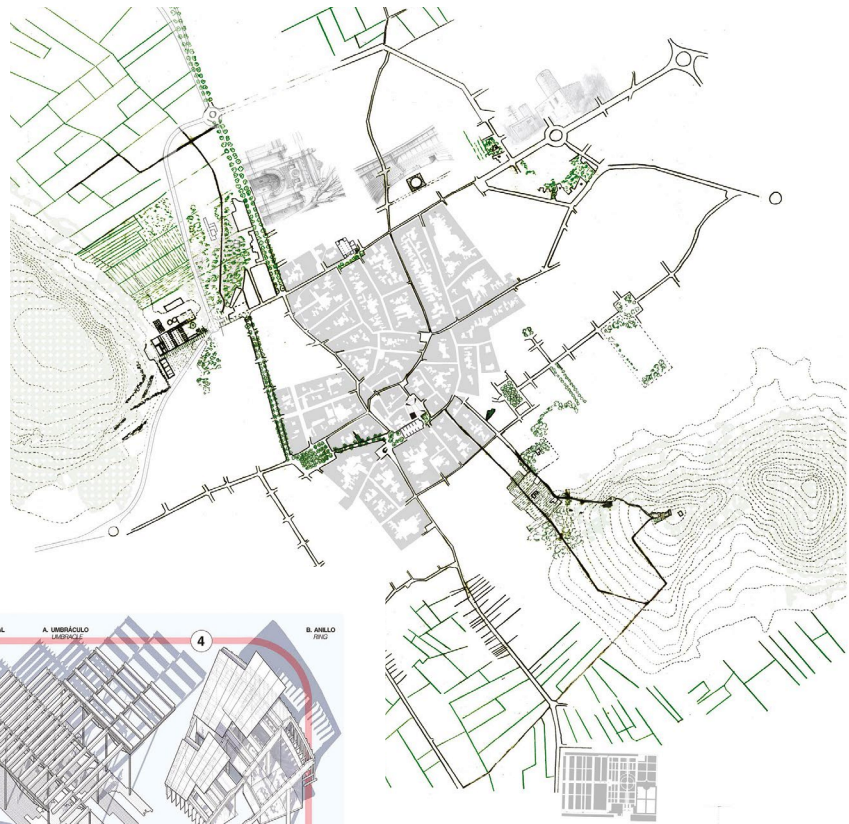
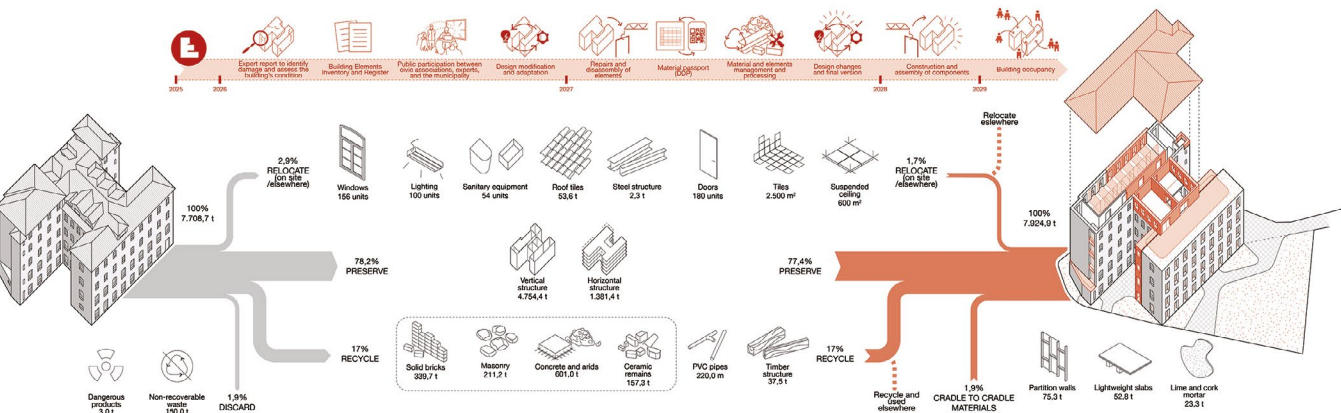


Fig. 5 – Getafe (ES)
Special Mention
LA CIRCULAR
→ See more p.218

Fig. 6 – Oviedo (ES)
Special Mention
LA MATERIA
→ See more p.232



unpredictable and composing with them. As the authors conclude: 'It's not about predicting, but about enabling'.

MULTILAYERED LANDSCAPES

Rediscovering relations between the large scale and the scale of proximity is a common approach found on the E18 entries to reconnect disused buildings with their contexts. Some entries work with the notion of a multilayered heritage as a productive force to inform the reuse process. The idea of a living-lab of transformation process is often rooted in the landscape and the local communities, triggering projects where experimentation becomes a method related to everyday needs, seasons and uses.

An emblematic example is the winning proposal in Blagnac (FR), *The Commons Laboratory* (fig. 3), focused on reintegrating the site into a carefully studied territory, taking advantage of the local resources. Rather than adding more buildings, the project focuses on restoring the natural links between people and environments. The existing buildings are reused through one-off minimum interventions with programmatic diversity as an ongoing experimental link to the territory.

Also in the former winery Es Sindicat en Felanitx (ES), winning project *RE[V]URE ES SINDICAT* (fig. 4) understands the large building as an interface to reconnect the natural ecosystems of the surroundings with the city implementing a new productive tapestry. In line with this ambitious landscape vision, the project demonstrates how cultural and artistic programs could revitalise Es Sindicat while evoking memories of its original purpose.

AS FOUND MATERIALITIES

Reviewing the E18 entries, we can find how the adaptive and circular projects respond to as found environments are growing as a practice of minimum interventions of reuse on-site, combining technical accuracy and the indeterminacy of chance with a new sense of authorship and without a predetermined aesthetics. These projects render the caring of the already-there through methodological

processes that include a very precise measuring of the built stock.

In Copenhagen, Pihlmann Architects recently transformed the former Thoravej 29 industrial hall into a municipal disability centre, culminating in 95% of the material to be repurposed within the building itself. The building is its own material bank.

We found this kind of logic in two special mention projects in Spain in Getafe with *LA CIRCULAR* (fig. 5) and in Oviedo with *LA MATERIA* (fig. 6). The first one starts the project narrative describing the building as a large prefabricated circular system – 2,180m³ concrete, 2,150 pieces across 26 typologies – that has remained inert since 2015. The team creates spatial conditions for a multifunctional program by reusing 100% of these precast components. The design serves as a Circular Knowledge Transfer Centre for the future, setting an example for the more than 1,800 buildings in Spain. The second one offers a procedure of selective deconstruction to create a new housing model in a similar approach where the existing building is transformed into a material bank of 7,708.7 tons of available resources, of which 2.9% are relocated, 78.2% preserved, 17% recycled and 1.9% discarded.

...TOWARDS A NEW NORMAL

We could consider these operational strategies – timeliness frameworks, multilayered landscapes, as found materialities – as the basis for a new *urbanism of modesty*: a performance for a new spectacularity that empowers resources as a normality to reuse existing *elephants*. If timber construction is nowadays considered as the new normal in central Europe in terms of the building industry, could we consider this *practice of modesty* to be the new normal in urban and rural transformation processes?

Transforming Ensembles: From Driving-Force to Driving-Source

By Bernd Vlay (AT)

Architect, teacher, researcher, co-founder of
StudioVlayStreeruwitz in Wien (AT) – www.vlst.at/en/

The following selection of projects doesn't face *elephants* but *ensembles* that circle around an imaginary re:sourcing of a heritage that is 'broken' in different ways and different scales: lack of life, loss of function, isolation, fragmentation. By means of thoughtful project/process-conceptualizations heritage itself becomes the trigger of a powerful transformation unfolding suppressed and hidden potentials of the existing. Broken first life becomes the driving force of vital second life through 're-environmentalization': site-specific geographies empower environmental, cultural and social traces enabling multi-scalar rehabilitation through deep transformation. This paradoxical 'figure of making' dissolves the restrictive dichotomy of preserving and destructing, liberating heritage from its mono-identity of a mythical first life. Second life flowers as a carefully elaborated setting of multiple traces. Their ingenious and imaginary orchestration decipher the already there to become the *driving-source* of a multilayered transformation process.

PRODUCTIVE BLASTING

A Museum is not a Museum / A Village is not a Village

Strong figures entail strong identities – archetypes whose dominant narrative hides a bunch of latent qualities. In this case one might have to blast the archetype in order to allow suppressed qualities to blossom.

The winning project in Riez (FR), *The mystery of the apple and the bear* (fig. 1), suggests

a thoughtful and promising *disintegration* of the village in order to consolidate its geographical potential. A matrix of 'deep heritage' establishes a vital 'ecosystem of gestures, uses, stories, landscapes, soils, and other living things' that embeds the village in a territorial figure, animated by a model of shared governance, finally liberating Riez from Riez.

In Trondheim (NO) a new museum shall act as a catalyst for revitalising an isolated part of downtown. Winning project *Leütenhaven Reclaimed* (fig. 2) dissolves the museum as an object weaving an ensemble of buildings into the city's fabric. An underground parking garage turns into a sunken square which extends the adjacent public space into the museum's heart absorbing the museum's institutional entity in a larger environment. Museum visitors become strolling citizens in public space.

SCENOGRAPHIC WEAVINGS

Re:Sourcing Peri-Urban Pleasures

Quite contrary to Trondheim (NO) and Riez (FR) the sites in Roa (NO) and Speichersdorf (DE) are characterised by a periurban sprawl lacking a strong archetypical urban figure. The winning projects demonstrate that the overall 'broken' presence of the rural landscape within a fragmented suburban condition can be a driving-source to establish a surprising peri-urban coherence and new forms of centrality.

In the winning project of Roa (NO), *Roa's Rag Rug* (fig. 3), the power of Roalinna's

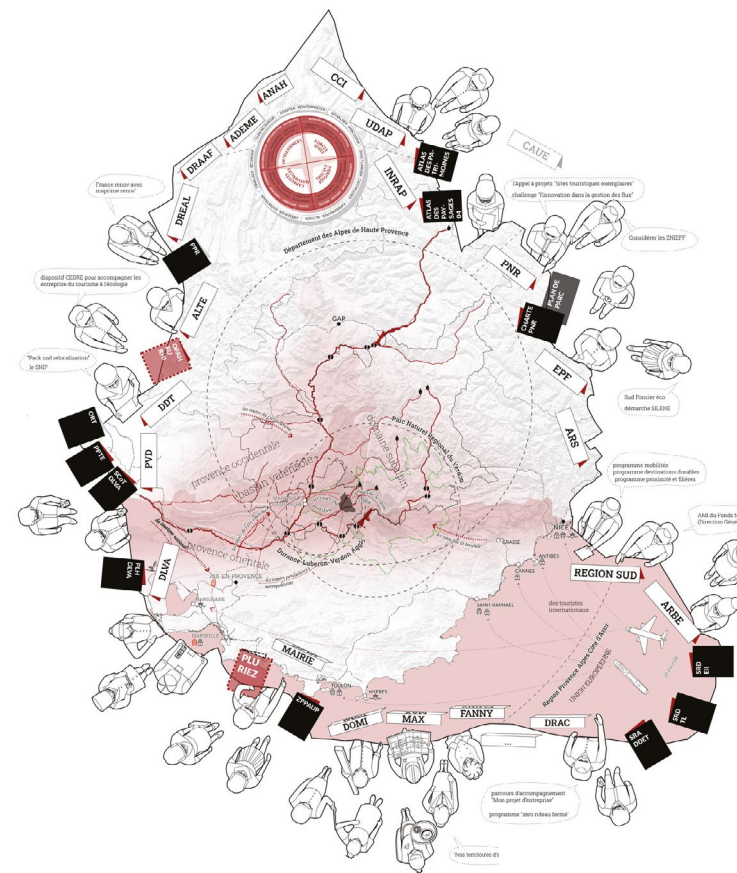


Fig. 1 – Riez (FR)
Winner
The mystery of the apple and the bear
→ See more p.236

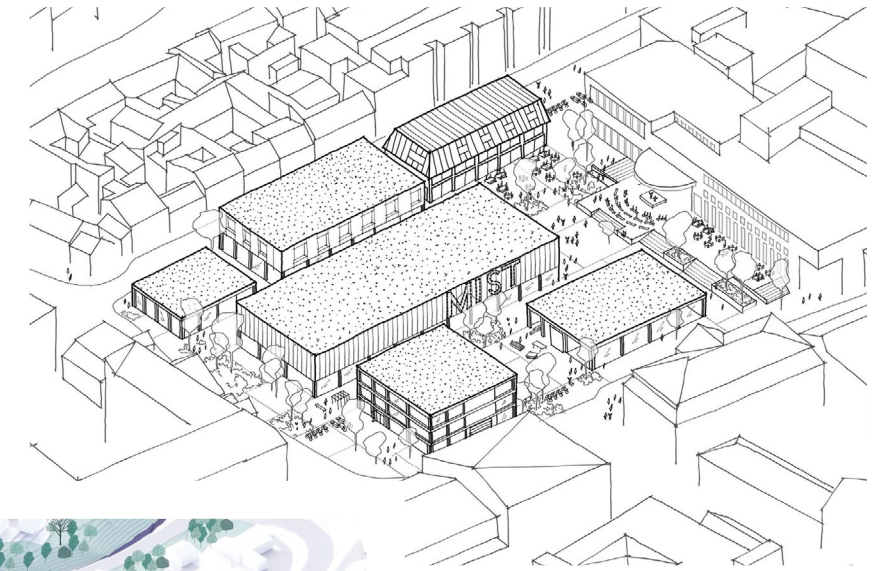


Fig. 2 – Trondheim (NO)
Winner
Leütenhaven Reclaimed
→ See more p.248



Fig. 3 – Roa (NO)
Winner
Roa's Rag Rug
→ See more p.242



Fig. 4 – Speichersdorf (DE)
Winner
Restorative Productive Space
→ See more p.110



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



Fig. 6 – Lahti (FI)
Winner
Active Trajectories
→ See more p.222

centrality not only relies on the compressed sequence of central uses between two public transport stops. Rather, it stages a geographical identity: the Rag Rug – a carpet into which landscape patches are woven as remnants of former buildings – forms a ‘green embroidery’. It stitches together Roalinna with its surrounding landscape. Its inclusive character stages a synergetic relationship of geography and place – a *re:sourcing-scenography*. Its staged oscillation between openness and intensification becomes the driving-source of a new centrality.

In Speichersdorf (DE) winning project *Restorative Productive Space* (fig. 4) establishes this oscillation through an archipelago of post-agrarian islands on which fast growing plants contribute to a circular process of energy production. Along the islands’ fringe a green park-seam adds a range of recreational uses to the productive program. Moreover, a network of pathways along and across the islands introduces walkable pleasures whose scenographic moments establish a powerful coherence that re:sources the broken peri-urban condition instead of denying it.

TRANSFORMATIVE VECTORS

Making Lines a Source of Re:Sourcing

What if linear figures such as a street or a central spine are turned into a vector of transformation with an impact far beyond their physical limits? Whereas the winning project in Bregenz-Hard-Fußbach-Höchst (AT), *Recode the Road* (fig. 5), imagines strategies for an existing national road to become a linear ecological corridor contributing to the landscape’s regeneration, Lahti’s (FI) winner *Active Trajectories* (fig. 6) imagines the existing mobility spine as an active linear park suggesting a centrality that – beyond its sequential intensity – celebrates the transversal relationship between the city in the east and the landscape in the west.

In both projects the line becomes a vector that, almost magically, sets up a new ecological condition on a territorial scale: the street and the spine are ‘reborn’ as transformative vectors whose transversal power repairs the territorial condition, either in establishing

fruitful relationships and encounters (Lahti) or in resurrecting a damaged ecology by enabling their genetic talents to unfold (Bregenz-Hard-Fußbach-Höchst).

OPERATING ACROSS SCALES AND MODES The Grand Modesty of a New Normal

‘Productive Blasting’, ‘Scenographic Weavings’ and ‘Transformative Vectors’ operate beyond the object scale: *elephants*¹ dissolved into *ensembles* embedded in specific ‘geographies’ suffering from a desperate discrepancy: a lack of life faces an abundance of space and/or time (history). How to *re:source* this inhibiting abundance that suffers from a lack of life? By promoting a multilayered heritage that simultaneously operates across scales and modes (culturally, socially, historically, institutionally, programmatically) the winning teams underline an eco-geographical attitude that introduces a resource-driven sensitivity beyond an ostensible spectacle. Each of these eco-geographies relies on the resilience of the site’s genetic code, of its operational potential which the projects impressively transfer into promising performance figures. Here, the wheel has come full circle: *elephants*¹ and *ensembles* enjoy the grand modesty of a new normal.

1. Know more about elephants in the previous article *The New Normal for Elephants* on p.186.