

From Soil to Groundswell: Emerging Landscape Processes

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Soil as a regenerative infrastructure – capable of generating new ecological and social relations – emerges from a long trajectory in contemporary landscape thought rather than from a simple response to crisis. This perspective shifts the focus of design from built form to the ecological and spatial processes embedded in the ground.

An early expression of this shift appeared in *Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape* (MoMA, New York, 2005), which showed how cities were reclaiming obsolete spaces by working with existing ecological and material conditions. In this view, soil is no longer a passive substrate but a living infrastructure that structures processes of regeneration and territorial transformation.

The European 18 rewarded projects in the category *Re-Sourcing from Natural Elements / Reactivating Soils* operate within this logic. On these sites, soil guides the evolution of the place, activating transformation processes that do not replace existing conditions but awaken their latent capacities. From territorial to microbial scales, the biological dimension of soil generates new ecological and social relations, fostering interactions oriented toward mutual benefit. Landscape is thus understood as a relational system rather than a finished object: to design is to create the conditions from which resilient and cooperative dynamics can emerge.

Special mention project *Ten Guidelines of Transformation* in Eslöv (SE) proposes the urban regeneration of an industrial heritage where process itself becomes the agent of environmental and social reconstruction. Ten guidelines – ranging from phytoremediation to processual density and hydrological balance – anchor adaptability, learning, and resilience over time. Streets are recalibrated, buildings are erected in temporal sequences, and temporary structures such as greenhouses and pavilions activate space between phases. Density emerges as the ground recovers its capacity to sustain life, and the first residential clusters are conceived as extensions of the regenerated landscape: productive courtyards, edible gardens, water-harvesting systems, and envelopes inspired by regional agricultural typologies articulate an architecture that breathes and mediates between public and domestic realms (fig. 1).

Following a similar logic, winning project *Hej Växnäs!* in Karlstad (SE) transforms an industrial area into a sustainable neighbourhood through a phased process: Reactivate, with pilot projects that bring new life to industrial buildings, creating creative hubs and a green axis connecting the city centre to the urban forest through early community participation; Reintegrate, introducing modular housing, cultural spaces, and mobility improvements that convert warehouses



Fig. 1 Eslöv (SE)
Special mention
Ten Guidelines of Transformation
→ See more p.88

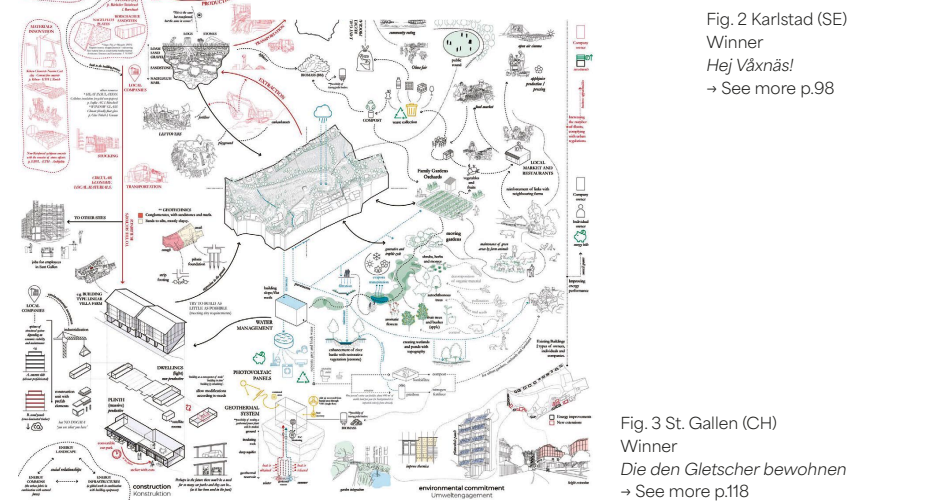


Fig. 2 Karlstad (SE)
Winner
Hej Växnäs!
→ See more p.98



Fig. 3 St. Gallen (CH)
Winner
Die den Gletscher bewohnen
→ See more p.118



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



Fig. 5 Speichersdorf (DE)
Winner
Restorative Productive Space
→ See more p.110

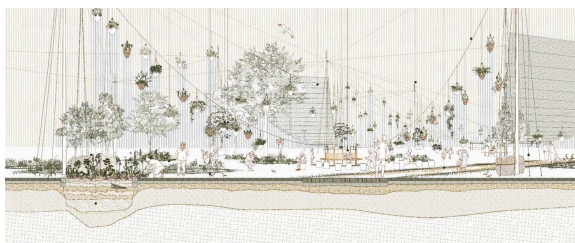
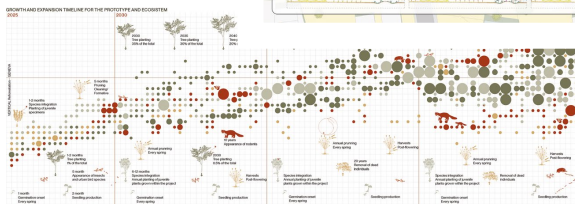


Fig. 6 Genève (CH)
Special mention
VERTICAL Reforestation
→ See more p.95

into dynamic urban assets; and Reconnect, consolidating a resilient and replicable urban fabric through strategic infrastructures, parks, rain gardens, and bioclimatic housing. In both projects, soil and existing elements are not obstacles but regenerative resources, and early, visible action builds trust while preparing the ground for lasting change (fig. 2).

Other projects, such as winning project *Die den Gletscher bewohnen* in St. Gallen (CH) reveal how geology conditions both architecture and regeneration. Located at the threshold between molasse and moraine formations, the project responds to unstable soils and forgotten watercourses by generating green corridors, wetlands, and retention areas that support biodiversity and microclimate. Architecture operates as a flexible infrastructure, open to temporary appropriation and negotiation between permanence and possibility, turning the ground into a platform for continuous transformation (fig. 3).

Soil-forming metaphors – the garden, the orchard, the forest – act as catalysts for regeneration processes, activating biodiversity alongside social and productive relations in the following projects:

Runner-up project *Between the Walls* in Eslöv (SE) reuses existing walls and gables to insert biomaterials – straw, reed, hemp, and reclaimed timber – between solid structures, generating microclimates, productive land uses, and enhanced biodiversity. Walls, vegetation, and water systems organise gradients between public, semi-public, and private spaces, while former industrial hangars are converted into prefabrication areas and collective courtyards connected to new green spaces, fostering an integrated and regenerative habitability (fig. 4).

Winning project *Restorative Productive Space* in Speichersdorf (DE) advocates preserving agricultural soil without sealing it, maintaining its productive function while integrating it as recreational space for the city. Through an urban and temporal framework, the project distinguishes between soils to be protected for their fertility and those more suitable for development. Collective housing is concentrated near the station on

low-fertility land, while a residential exchange system promotes intergenerational mobility: older residents move into adapted homes, and released houses are rehabilitated for young families – achieving social renewal without consuming new soil. The project demonstrates that the orchard is not merely productive land but an ecological and social infrastructure linking soil, biodiversity, water management, and urban experience within a dynamic process of activation and regeneration (fig. 5).

Special mention project *VERTICAL Reforestation* in Genève (CH) conceives the square as climatic and ecological infrastructure beyond its role as a mobility node, making climate action visible and shared through reforestation. A vegetation calendar based on the Miyawaki method – integrated into Geneva's climate strategies for 2030 and 2070 – positions vegetation as urban infrastructure rather than decoration. The proposal inverts the conventional outward expansion of green space, proposing renaturation from within through dense micro-forests in the city's core. Reforestation unfolds as a participatory process: a prototype at Plan Palais activates successive phases of germination, aerial nursery, and transplantation, reusing existing elements to create microclimates, pedagogical spaces, and new forest layers. Hard, sterile surfaces are progressively transformed into shaded, biodiverse, and resilient public environments (fig. 6).

These projects show that soil – and process-based design – seeks not a final product, but an adaptive landscape where architecture, ecology and community interact over time. Soil becomes an active infrastructure that supports biodiversity and social relations. Urban regeneration thus operates as a groundswell where time, participation and local resources generate evolving territorial value.