

Sustaining Open Neighbourhoods by Design?

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SUSTAINING OPEN NEIGHBOURHOODS BY DESIGN?

In this first part, we address some of the above-mentioned questions through the study of seven fantastic rewarded projects in: Clermont-Ferrand, Miramas, and Romainville, in France; Vitoria-Gasteiz, Barcelona, and Madrid, in Spain; and Amersfoort-Otto Scheltus, in the Netherlands. ‘Introducing Planet Earth at your Doorstep’, ‘Supporting Negotiable Futures’ and ‘Designing Incompleteness’ are the three design strategies I propose using as analytical filters to reveal the design patterns of open neighbourhoods across the seven rewarded projects.

Introducing Planet Earth at Your Doorstep

The Fontaine du Bac housing complex is part of the Limagne plain at Clermont-Ferrand (FR). A typical 1970s centralised-designed and built housing development, sitting within a controlled vegetated surface (more on p.293). European has invited young practitioners to suggest ways to connect the site with the rest of the city and to propose means of implementing the values of the European Union’s

‘Green Transition’, including addressing the challenges of an ageing population and the lack of proximity services. Similar challenges are relevant to Cité Chiminote, a former railway housing estate in Miramas (FR) (more on p.305), a city influenced by the current intensive agricultural activities in the Crau region. Flash rainfalls in autumn 2055, mistral winds, droughts and a wet winter of 2100, subterranean grounds comprising layers of poudinge rocks, sands, the Crau water table and clays. They are all depicted on an axonometric drawing of the *Radical softness*, runner-up project for Miramas. It seems to be part of a critical zone, according to Bruno Latour, where planet Earth’s climate change is being observed and addressed through a design strategy that addresses the scarcity of water resources (fig. 1). Let’s look at another drawing, from the *Space for All* runner-up project in Clermont-Ferrand (FR). It is a colourful frontal axonometric that depicts a park system, a network of natural spaces with variable levels of human and nature presence, with increased biodiversity, according to the authors. The drawing

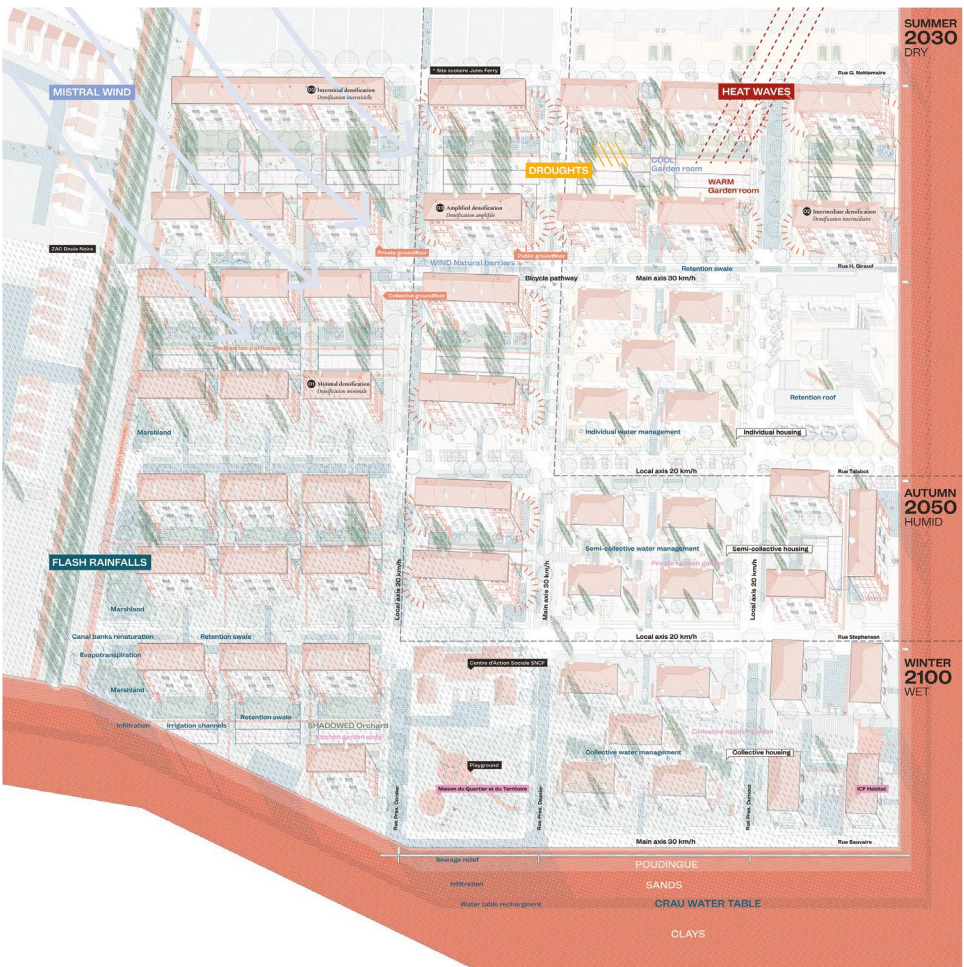


Fig. 1 – Miramas (FR)
Runner-up
Radical softness
→ See more p.306

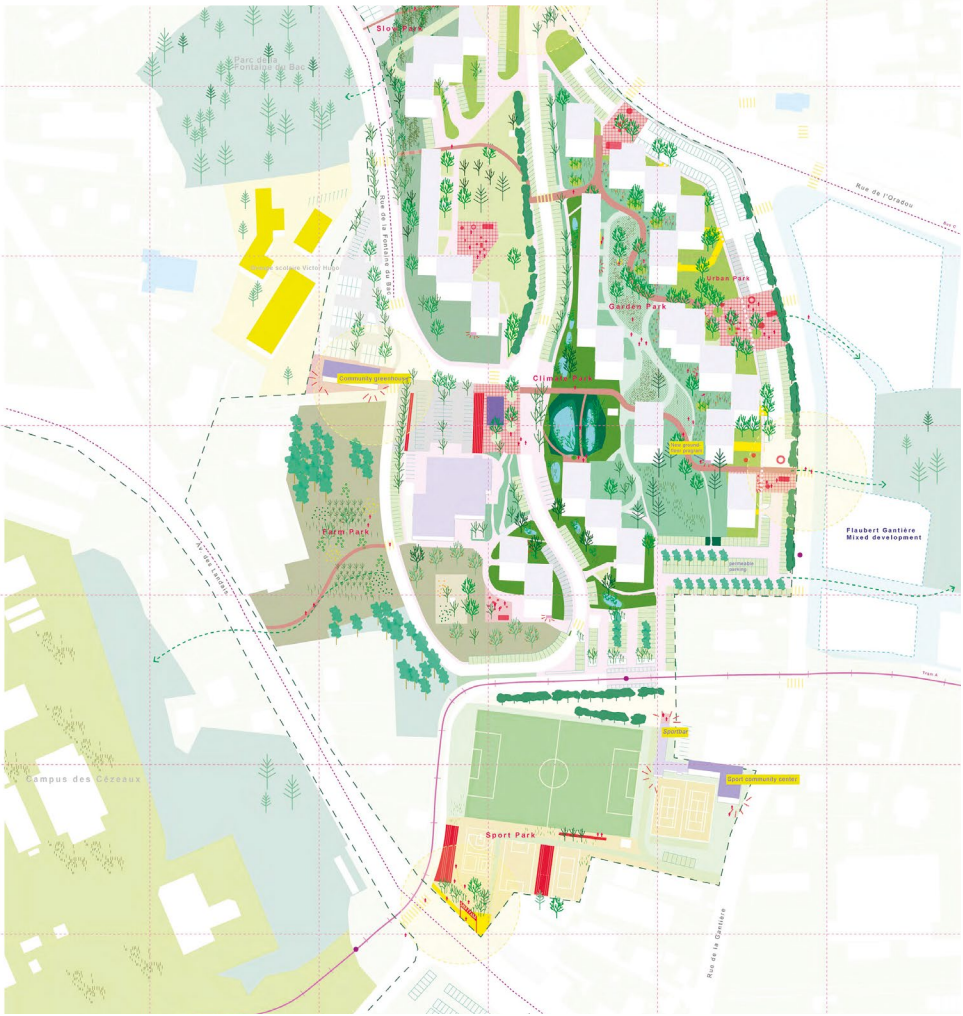


Fig. 2 – Clermont-Ferrand (FR)
Runner-up
Space for All
→ See more p.296



Fig. 3 – Romainville (FR)
 Runner-up
QUARTIER MONDE – Libre Pensée
 → See more p.314

Fig. 4 – Madrid (ES)
 Runner-up
Cultivating the Commons
 → See more p.302



fosters a potential shared vision among the inhabitants of Fontaine du Bac for co-creating a new landscape (fig. 2).

Both projects offer a concrete set of strategies on ‘how to land on planet Earth’, answering Bruno Latour’s interrogation¹. They design constructive entanglements between housing estates and natural processes. They embark on transforming the public grounds, a tiny piece of planet Earth’s crust, by adjusting the ground floors of the existing apartment buildings. Isn’t it a way to sustain the openness of the two neighbourhoods by supporting the spatial practices of planetary citizens?

Supporting Negotiable Futures

The Les Ormes district in Romainville (FR), a neighbourhood of mostly single-family homes, has found itself at a crossroads both geographically and existentially (more on p.311). What is the future of Les Ormes, a typical Parisian metropolitan suburb under enormous land development pressure due to the planning of new public transport connections (metro and tram)? The Casa de Campo neighbourhood in Madrid (ES) is flanked by two large transport infrastructures. It is much denser than Les Ormes with apartment buildings and still insufficient shared spaces (more on p.299). The site is part of the Madrid Metropolitan Neighbourhoods Green Transition Plan. Nevertheless, how could the rewarded projects enhance the active agency of Casa de Campo’s inhabitants in this transition?

Runner-up projects *QUARTIER MONDE – Libre Pensée* in Romainville (FR) and *Cultivating the Commons* in Madrid (ES) reject master-planning as a modality to address such questions. Instead, they offer a complex design apparatus of piecemeal urbanism. They adopt an open design process and populate it with guides, tools, scenarios, principles and manifestos.

We are looking at a beautiful site plan for the future-to-be situated urbanism as part of the *Quartier Monde* project. All buildings are depicted by their absence as white holes on an immense colourful carpet-like ground (fig. 3). Thanks to the six principles the ‘Quartier Monde carpet’ will be collectively woven by

composing with gleanings and adjustments, creating new proximities of use and offering new collective spaces, and turning the interstices into micro-public spaces. The project’s authors propose performing the six principles as an alternative to the future envisioned by the real estate land pressures. Yet, in some instances, they risk being more generic than situated.

In the same logic as *QUARTIER MONDE*’s situated urbanism produced the ‘carpet’, *Cultivating the Commons* offers a series of perspective drawings. A colourful interstitial space, populated with vegetation and activities, dominates the foreground where the buildings, depicted with black lines, remain in the background (fig. 4). An interstitial space becomes a field of potential common ground. The perspective image, which is also true of *QUARTIER MONDE*’s site plan, shows an indicative spatial manifestation of a complex collaborative design process.

A time diagram on the same panel provides some hints about the design process, but risks being too linear and unable to incorporate potential controversial matters one would expect in such a context.

Yet, the success of both projects lies in the acceptance of the imprevisible future as a legitimate partner of today’s planning. Openness in this case is manifested in the urban design projects by embracing unpredictability, uncertainty, slowness, as well as modalities of collective governance.

Designing Incompleteness

Vitoria-Gasteiz (ES): the competition site comprises five run-down, yet still inhabited apartment buildings (more on p.325). The apartment building on the competition site in Amersfoort-Otto Scheltus (NL) has been lying empty for a while increasing the concern of the neighbourhood’s inhabitants regarding its future development (more on p.271). In Barcelona-La Verneda (ES), the future building lot lies empty. It is an open space within an existing neighbourhood (more on p.277).

What kind of urban forms and architectural typologies can one use to enhance sociability and exchange among current and

newcoming residents? How to reuse existing buildings or build new ones to host newcomers of medium- to lower-income status in existing neighbourhoods without causing evictions or raising NIMBY reactions?

An axonometric line drawing depicts the reused apartment buildings in Vitoria-Gasteiz (ES). The structures are wrapped with a new ‘blanket’ following Lacaton & Vassal’s architectural paradigm (*Care Blanket*, winning project, fig. 5). Another axonometric drawing shows how the existing apartment building in Amersfoort-Otto Scheltus (NL) is divided into units thanks to new vertical circulation cores (*ont mOeTTO me halverwege*, winning project, fig. 6). Both reused buildings are depicted sitting comfortably within the existing urban fabric thanks to an inviting reprogrammed ground floor with shared amenities and public space. A site plan in a black-and-white line drawing shows the proposed housing building in Barcelona-La Verneda (ES) (*Komorebi*, winning project, fig. 7), located within the thickness of an urban armature that connects the main public spaces of the neighbourhood. The new building, thanks to the shape of the ground floor, invites the pedestrian public flow, creating a passage territory according to Sennett’s open city.

All three projects in the reciprocal sites offer incomplete urban forms, another value of the open city, thus inviting public space, hence the city, to play a crucial role in shaping the final design outcome. Additionally, all three projects take particular care of the apartments’ shared spaces. Aren’t they both building shared spaces and porosity to the public space, the cradle for emerging open neighbourhood subjectivities?

CONCLUSION

Jane Jacobs’ famous neighbourhood has gone under harsh gentrification replacing the 1960s population and urban activities with new ones from a much higher social status. Could Jacobs’ neighbourhood openness have been maintained by design?

Thanks to the three design strategies that have set the framework for revisiting the seven rewarded projects, we have developed concrete examples of openness in urban neighbourhoods. ‘Introducing Planet Earth at your Doorstep’ showed us how design can support neighbourhood residents in becoming planetary citizens through spatial practices. ‘Supporting Negotiable Futures’ highlighted the manifestation of openness in embracing unpredictability, uncertainty, and slowness, as well as modalities of collective governance. And ‘Designing Incompleteness’ revealed the cradle for emerging open neighbourhood subjectivities.

The complex design apparatus, as well as the quality and genre of the modes of representation of the seven projects are extraordinary. They show the exigency of design-led visual information and its active agency in the political arena where the projects have entered.

Is it enough to resist current land development pressures and increasing segregation tendencies? They offer roadmaps to a future to be collectively produced, inviting the rest of the urban actors to take their share of responsibility.

Fig. 5 – Vitoria-Gasteiz (ES)
Winner
Care Blanket
→ See more p.326

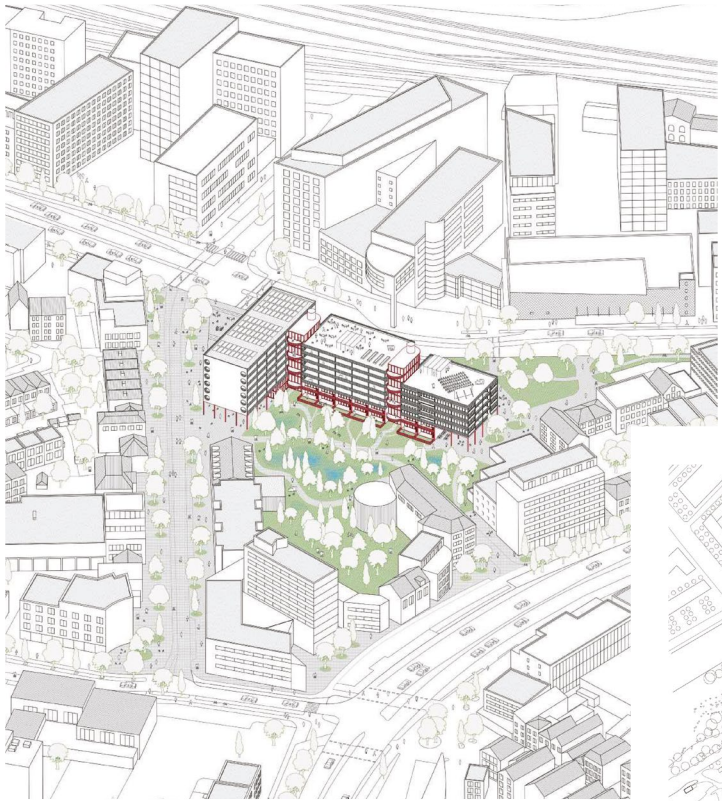
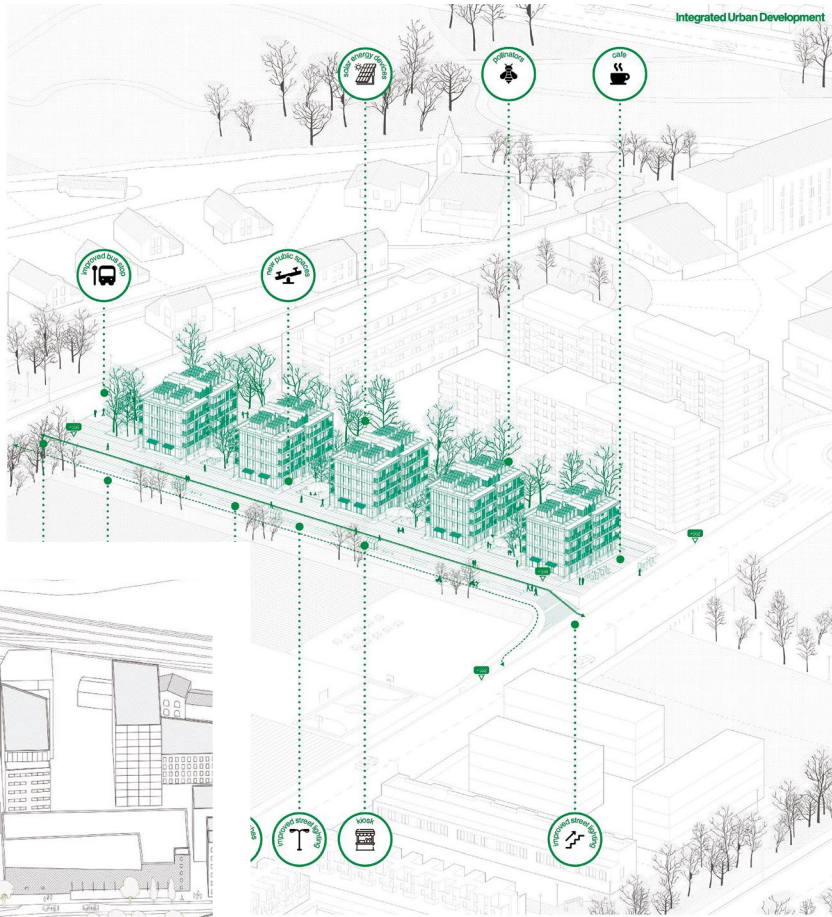


Fig. 6 – Amersfoort-Otto Scheltus (NL)
Winner
ont mOeTTO me halverwege
→ See more p.272

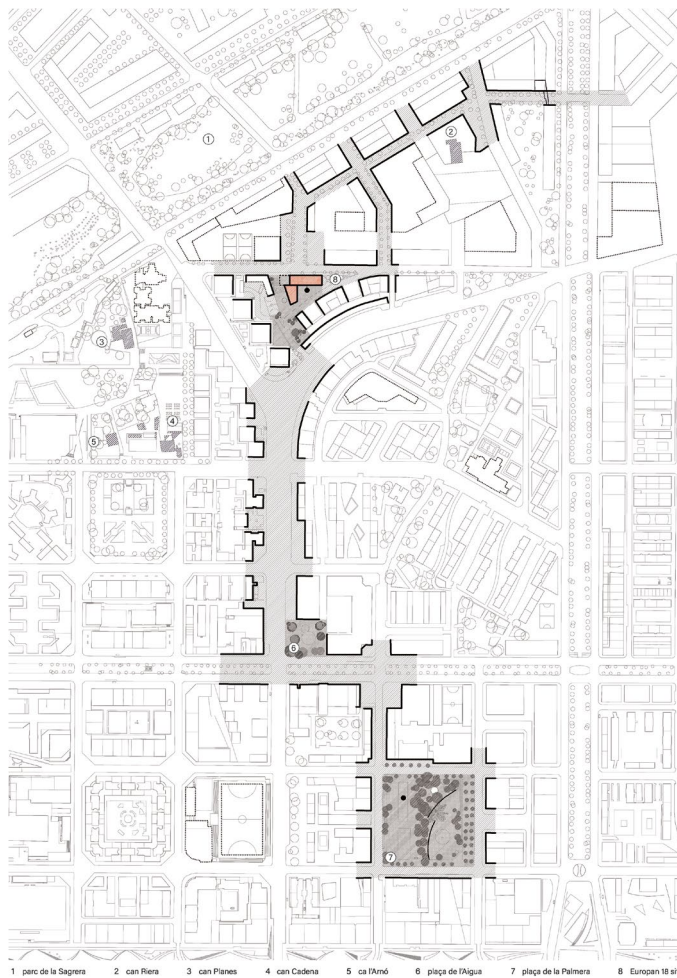


Fig. 7 – Barcelona-La Verneda (ES)
Winner
Komorebi
→ See more p.278

1. Latour, Bruno. Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018.