

Building on the Various Agencies of People and Places

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To promote open neighbourhoods, we must ask what needs to be open, to what, and to whom. The sites in this family feature vulnerable, isolated, and often neglected neighbourhoods; nevertheless, they have great potential! Whether in Romainville (FR), Madrid (ES), Caen (FR), Uppsala (SE), Miramas (FR), or Vitoria-Gasteiz (ES), the existing situation, while not always remarkable, is rich in ways of life, community networks, inventive typologies, and ecosystem anchors. Through the rewarded projects, we highlight three complementary approaches that promote open neighbourhoods and initiate exemplary processes for urban regeneration.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES FOR A SHARED AGENCY

Opening up decision-making to residents is a fundamental lever to promote open neighbourhoods: who defines the specifications, how do needs emerge, and what mechanisms to use to involve residents as actors in the regeneration of their living milieus? Far from superficial or ‘cosmetic’ consultation processes, the European projects focus on devising inclusive processes capable of restoring real capacity for action to local communities. Winning project *Rendez-vous sous les Ormes* in Romainville (FR) illustrates this approach by focusing on meeting places conceived as a situational, event-based mechanism (fig. 1). Drawing on ritualization, the team builds a relational and political infrastructure that allows the neighbourhood’s future to be collectively reimagined. This strategy makes sense in a

context of high vulnerability to land pressure, where the residents’ union becomes a tool of resistance against speculative logic. These micro-political situations arising in strategic areas of the neighbourhood reveal the site’s situational potential¹ and mark the first steps towards collective mobilization. In Madrid (ES), special mention project *Colectivo Colonia* is developing a virtual ‘empowerment’ infrastructure. The team designs a digital platform for action (fig. 2) bringing together residents, spaces, and collected data to shape a collective vision for the neighbourhood’s transformation. The application links needs or emergencies with spaces and opens up associated transformation scenarios. These scenarios are then developed locally and translated into concrete transformation actions through two modalities: tactical and structural. Attention to these gradual transformations allows ideas to be tested in the real conditions before structural implementation.

REINFORCING THE EXISTING POTENTIAL THROUGH INCREMENTAL DESIGN

Promoting open neighbourhoods also means accepting uncertainty. The processes are open and evolving, taking shape through experimentation and reorientation. Here, projects use incremental approaches, allowing ideas to emerge from neighbourhoods, be tested at small-scale and evolve based on the effects of these first transformations. In Caen (FR), special mention project *CITÉ/ÉCOLE: Learning through the city* takes as starting point the void left by the



Fig. 1 – Romainville (FR)
Winner
Rendez-vous sous les Ormes
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Fig. 2 – Madrid (ES)
Special Mention
Colectivo Colonia
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Fig. 3 – Caen (FR)
Special Mention
CITÉ/ÉCOLE: Learning through the city
→ See more p.292

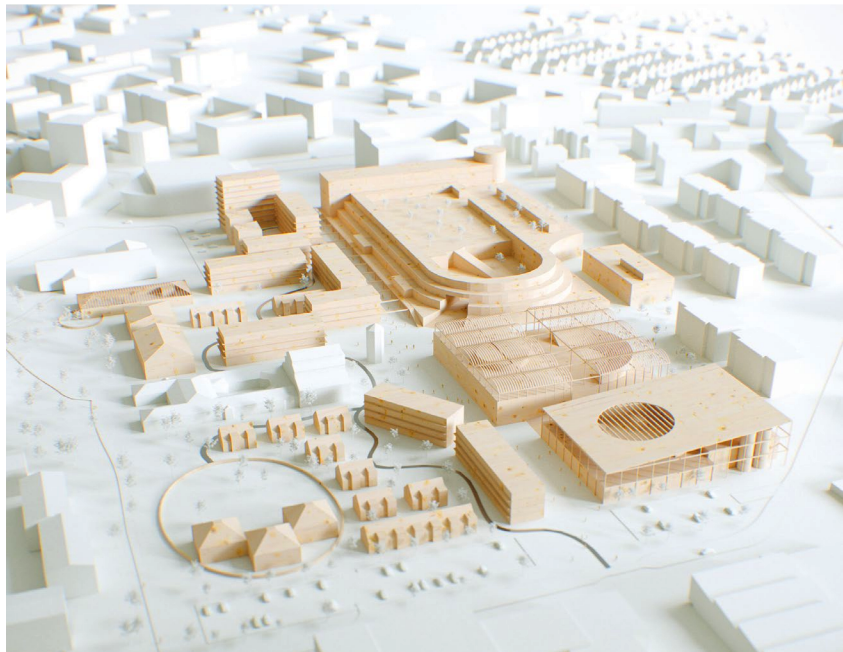


Fig. 4 – Uppsala (SE)
Runner-up
Staging the Scene
→ See more p.322

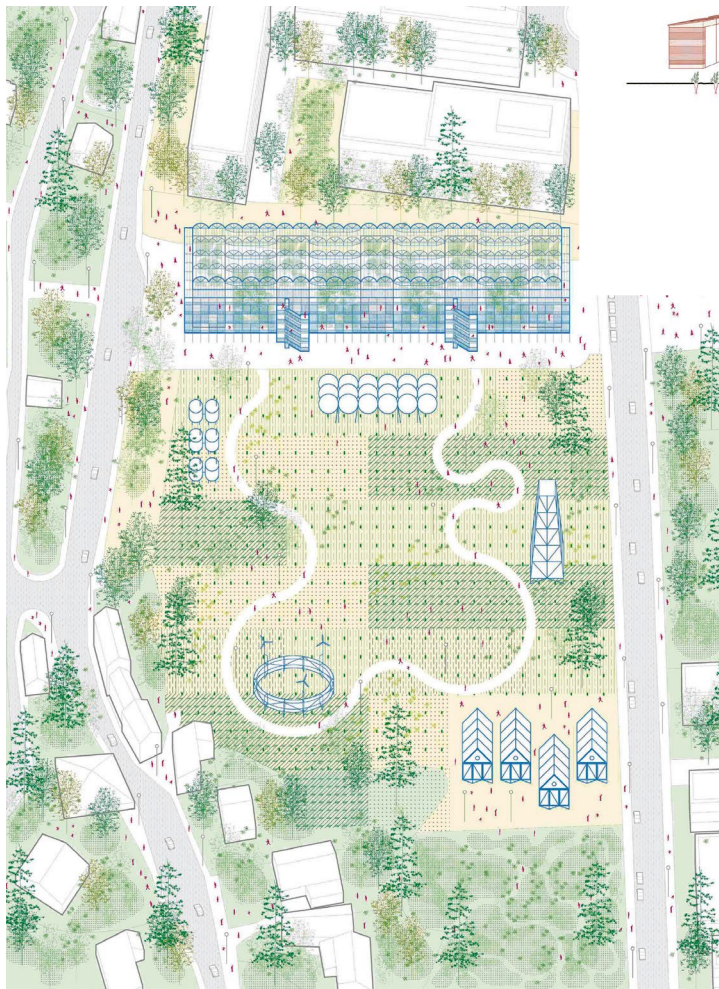


Fig. 6 – Vitoria-Gasteiz (ES)
Special Mention
Five Skins – Bustaldea
→ See more p.330

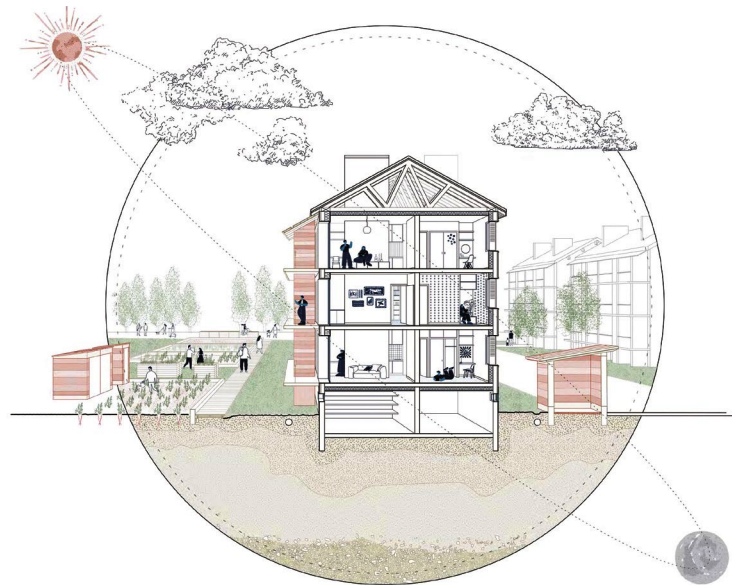


Fig. 5 – Miramas (FR)
Runner-up
Still, Life
→ See more p.308

disappearance of the Albert Jacquard middle school. This void is both physical, marked by demolition and symbolic, reflecting the loss of a central place in the neighbourhood’s collective memory. The project rebuilds a centrality from these remains (fig. 3), regenerating an inherited spatial figure while developing an open program around learning and collective transmission. The process unfolds like an open score, where the site – epicentre of the neighbourhood’s rebirth – becomes an experimental base camp, evolving until it becomes the new heart of the neighbourhood by 2040. In Uppsala (SE), runner-up project *Staging the Scene* takes an incremental approach on another scale, tackling the gradual transformation of a major activity centre (fig. 4). ‘The proposal sees Gottsunda as a place that evolves with the people who live there, not through a complete reset but by carefully building on what already exists’. Rather than a radical transformation, the team proposes a series of precise actions – cutting, opening, connecting, adding, reconfiguring – carried out on the existing structure with careful attention. The transformation is conceived as a continuous process, building the site’s evolution over time, without however emphasising the effects of one transformation or another in the design of the process.

BEYOND BUILDINGS, ARCHITECTURE AS A REGENERATIVE ECOSYSTEM

Beyond transforming buildings, opening up neighbourhoods means reconnecting them to broader territorial ecosystems. Here, projects are no longer limited to issues of improving access through mobility or creating new centres of activity – they rather seek to integrate habitats into wider ecological, landscape, and productive systems. In Miramas (FR), runner-up project *Still, Life* considers the site as a territorial ecotone located at the interface of two larger ecosystems: the Crau plain and the Berre lagoon. The project is therefore part of a territorial ecology approach aimed at rebalancing environments through local synergies. It uses existing resources – agricultural waste from the Crau plain, silt taken from upstream of the

Étang de Berre, and reactivated canal networks – to design new soils, envelopes, and constructions at the heart of the railway town (fig. 5). By using water, pebbles, plant fibres, and silt as materials, the project contributes to the resilience of ecosystems while producing an architectural materiality rooted in the territory. In Vitoria-Gasteiz (ES), special mention project *Five Skins* explores a symbiotic relationship with territorial ecosystems inspired by Hundertwasser’s philosophy of five skins to open up strategies for coexistence with the environment (fig. 6). By rethinking domestic typologies, communal facilities, and the big house as a symbiotic ecosystem, the project aims to reconnect with the territory, going far beyond the transformation of the five existing housing blocks. By integrating circular water management, renewable energies, and ecological continuity, the project promotes a model of resilience and urban regeneration in harmony with the natural environment.

From this analysis on how some rewarded teams propose to ‘open’ neighbourhoods, we can deduce the necessity to share – in a much deeper way – the decision-making power to transform the city, and even more so when it comes to priority neighbourhoods. We must redouble our creativity to imagine the project infrastructures – as relational devices – necessary for any regenerative process that aims to be inclusive. It would seem a priority to favour incremental approaches, open-ended partitions, and care for each transformation effort (whether tactical or structural) by cultivating synergies between operations. This is how we can continue to think about and build the city in an agile and open way, paying ever greater attention to the broad spectrum of what is ‘already there’. Finally, we need to think more about transformations on multiple scales, taking care to link the transformation principles to broader territorial realities in order to think of the project as a regenerative ecosystem.

1. Boucher, M.-P. & Prost, J.-F. (2011). Fragments of action for the city: interview with Brian Massumi. *Inter*, (108), pp. 16-21.