INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Urban Nature through Projects
Towards a new coalition between city and nature

Call for papers

The conference “Urban nature through projects” aims to increase our understanding of the transformation of the city’s nature over time, as it relates to the nature as such. As part of this conference, we aim to explore the future of natural urban forms inherited from history (green promenades, urban parks, community gardens). Such exploration looks at the social demand for nature as observed in the cities, while taking into consideration that such demand constantly changes in space and time.

The conference’s key goal is to review and assess the current signs of transformation of nature models that architects, landscape architects and urban planners make use of to manage and design our cities. We will question the transformations in design agency, as working environments, where the transformations are shaped and guided, based on the different utilized processes, as well as the conceptual, theoretical and practical tools. Could we think that the ongoing transformations, as displayed in urban nature related projects, go beyond independent practice of innovation in the fields of architecture, urbanism and landscape? Could we conclude that a new kind of coalition between cities and nature is being experienced?

Perspectives and approaches

Since the Greeks, nature has been understood as what remains external to human beings, following its own principle of development. Being a principle more than a thing, the phusis defines what is at the origins of movement and rest. For living beings, it is similar to the understanding which any artisan, artist or designer would have of what underlies human pieces of works. Therefore, it’s not a coincidence that Aristotle had used architecture as an example to conceptualize the opposition between nature and human activity\(^1\). These days, he would have possibly chosen the city and the urban condition, as an example. Indeed, one may ask: do not our cities persist in defining themselves in relation to what they are not, the wilderness or the cultivated nature?

Nonetheless, in this relationship of otherness, the terms nature and urban refer back to the relationship of a human society and individuals to their physical environment and social milieu\(^2\). Moreover, almost all natural environments are anthropogenic and the cities seem to follow their own growing dynamics, despite any planning effort. They are driven by their own force and feed off their own energy, like cell masses. Referring to the Paris of the last

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\(^1\) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II-1, 1103b. The art of building a house, just like the virtue, is not a natural or instinctive state of the mind, but depends on a disposition acquired and improved through practice.

century, Le Corbusier said: “the modern-industrial radio-centric city is a flourishing cancer”\(^3\).

The association of concepts like “nature” and “urban”, which, since the French Environmental Round Table Grenelle de l’Environnement (2007) has constituted a key aspect of any discussion on the topic of “nature in the city” or “nature and the city”, is most likely behind this conceptual reorientation \(^4\). This association could be discussed in light of this unceasing transition between the two terms. Are we trying to define the nature – the singularity and reality – of the city, or the place of the nature – of living systems – in the city? With regards to city’s transformation related to the introduction, reintroduction, or protection of biodiversity, are we trying mistakenly to address it? Are we trying to relate the creation of natural conditions within the urban context with a - supposedly - better quality of life in the city?

Successively understood as “natura naturans” (in other words, free and creative nature, but not capricious or unreliable, since it behaves according to certain laws), and “nature naturata” (or the product of a combination of freedom and necessity), the “urban nature” corresponds more to a set of transformational processes (or a set of projects) rather than to an immutable essence or a stable state of being\(^5\). In this case, “urban nature” designates both, the city’s nature and the nature in the city,

Some questions about “naturality” as an urban ideal

This symposium will focus on philosophical contributions that would inform the historical evolutions of the concepts mentioned here until this point. However, conceptual analysis should focus on the facts and the issues of urban nature through projects. Additional key contributions are expected to come from disciplinary fields concerning urban spaces transformation processes as they relate to nature (including architecture, urbanism, landscape design and planning, as well as historical, sociological, environmental, and ethical approaches to these issues).

According to the statistics, about 50% of world population lived in cities in 2007, and this percentage will rise by up to 70% by 2050\(^6\). Several conditions explain this relevant increment: The city is synonymous with employment and provides services, along with unique cultural opportunities. Exceptionally, the city is the place of exchanges: exchanges of goods, knowledge, ideas, emotions\(^7\)...


\(^4\) These kinds of documents do not distinguish between cité (only in a few cases), city (or town) and urban environment. “Urban” is used in the sense of “what is inherent or refers to the city”, in opposition to the village (of a smaller size than the city) and to the countryside (which develops a rural economic activity, distinct from the city).

\(^5\) On the distinction between « natura naturans » and « natura naturata », see Spinoza, Short Treatise, I, chapter 8 and 9. For a synthetic introduction to the idea of “project” with regards to landscape and regional scale, see Catherine Chomarat-Ruiz, « Quelle valeur pour le patrimoine paysager? Du désir de paysage à la volonté de territoire », Projets de paysage, URL: http://www.projetsdepaysage.fr/fr/quellevaleurpourlepatriemoinepaysagerdudesirdepaysagealavolontede_territoire


However, beyond this statistic reality, do cities continue to enchant our imaginations and incite our hopes? As Georg Simmel emphasised, cities embody two creative ideals of culture: *man’s freedom*, inherited from Enlightenment, and *individuality*, from the XIX century values of Romanticism⁸.

From a more contemporary point of view, cities will continue to fascinate us, as under the socio-political injunction to construct a more natural city - and perhaps a *better* one -. The gap between the city and the “green paradise”, which we used to look for outside the city, would tend to be bridged⁹. Thus, just like freedom and individuality, *nature*, or *naturality*, would become an urban ideal.

However, this value, as a tool to evaluate the quality of our cities, may reveal itself as an illusion. After having envisaged the city as “de-naturata” and “de-naturans” (or “the place of all iniquities”), and after having understood nature as the place of all dangers inherent to rustically lifestyle, are we now suddenly ready to elaborate the myth of a city that has become as fascinating as nature itself¹⁰?

Moreover, the value of the *naturality* of the city might even have adverse effects. Would the reintroduction and extensive expansion of all kinds of urban forms – gardens, parks, promenades, wasteland, etc. - entail the erosion of nature *outside* the cities, e.g. rural or green spaces? Would these processes give an advantage to a certain part of the population and therefore implement new forms of urban spatial segregation¹¹? If the natural character of the city provokes this kind of debate, we could think that urban nature is a “framework” rather than a fact, a project rather than a statement, or even a set of projects, which point towards a new coalition, although in a contradictory way.

It is precisely the hypothesis of this new coalition that we wish to explore within the symposium. Does the “theory of the tightly woven net (résille)”, once defended by Marc Claramunt and Catherine Mosbach, recall the idea of a sterile opposition between what is *natural* and what is *constructed*, and thus bringing us back to the outdated opposition of nature and city¹²? Did Bernard Lassus, in his turn, distinguish between “garden-city” (*cité-jardin*) and “landscape-city” (*ville-paysage*), in order to valorize the condition of *openness* of the city in relation to its *other*¹³? The notion of “landscape-city” (*Stadtlandschaft*) had already been tested by the oeuvre of the German urban planner Rudolf Schwarz, since the 1940s-1950s¹⁴. Furthermore, since the publication of its reference manifesto, the North-

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American approach to Landscape Urbanism highlights how “landscape had become a lens through which the contemporary city is represented and a medium through which it is constructed”\(^\text{15}\). Finally, we all know the role played by community gardens in the progressive construction of terms such as “sustainable” and “equitable” city in places like Curitiba in Brazil\(^\text{16}\).

Afterwards, would this in-projects dimension of urban nature, which we may count under the polysemic term of “innovation”, need demographic density and amplitude, beside the feeling of freedom and the development of individuality, which only the city may bring together\(^\text{17}\)? In other words, only the city may innovate the place and role played by nature within it, and hence at the same time renewing its own nature and nature as such. In such a way, this kind of innovation through nature may participate and implement “urban marketing”, as it has been theorized by Richard Florida\(^\text{18}\). Besides such indicators as human talent, technological development and tolerance, without which innovation remains weak, would it not be essential to draw attention to the naturality of the city? Would it this corresponds to the idea of the city as the place where eco-districts, green roofs, gardens and other community green spaces blossom?

**Expected contributions**

In order to acknowledge the notions of nature, urbanity and design, and to analyse controversies that the naturality of city raises\(^\text{19}\), with regards to the new emerging coalition nature-city, we invite proposals on the following five main themes.

**Theme 1**

The first topic deals with historical approaches to the forms of urban nature, their evolution and impact. Nevertheless, this theme does not focus on retracing the history of the city or on reporting evaluation on the city “virtuous circle”\(^\text{20}\). The main objective of research within this theme is to explain the evolution of parks, gardens, green promenade, or other forms of urban nature, which appear in their long-lasting history as being radically different from a momentary political injunction, or as a fast-fashion phenomenon. How, for what reasons and from which perspective has the coalition between “nature” and “urbanity”, which originated the urban forms that we all know been produced? We will focus on the rhetorical and iconographic strategies that underpin the elaboration and diffusion of these models of urban nature. What as been the impact of this strategy on the evolution of urban and rural

\(^{15}\) Charles Waldheim (ed.), *The Landscape Urbanism Reader*, New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2006. About the rejection of the opposition of nature and city implied in Ian McHarg’s environmental planning practice, see the chapters “Terra Fluxus” by James Corner (pp. 23-33) and “Landscapes of Infrastructure” by Elisabeth Mossop (pp. 163-178).

\(^{16}\) Richard Rogers, Philip Gumuchdijan, *Cities For A Small Planet*, Faber And Faber, London, 1997

\(^{17}\) These principles are at the base of research on “Cities, Scaling and Sustainability” developed by the Santa Fe Institute (New Mexico).


land use? To what extent does the idea of urban agriculture still or once more correspond to the emergence of agriurbanism?21

With regards to facts and history, we will question the new urban utopias, the new foundation myths of the city, which spell out its relation to nature. We all know, for example, the North-American compromise between city and countryside, which represents the legacy of the national rural identity and still engenders relevant ecological consequences.22 Can urban design be re-vivified through recourse to the models of nature elaborated outside Europe? Beside other examples, we should keep in mind the botanical city of Roberto Burle-Marx, Joseph-Antoine Bouvard’s work in São Paulo, and the knowledge exchanges between France and Canada, implemented by Jacques Gréber. Which new urban myths are nowadays supported by arts - literature, painting, photography, cinema, comics...23? Are we currently witnessing a double approach to art and landscape practice? The one envisioning the planning and design of wasteland, the transformation of ugliness into beauty; the other searching to augment the aesthetic forces of spaces, in order to engender different interpretations and to transform their low aesthetic quality (which some name ugliness) into a strongly aesthetic individuality (which others would name beauty)?

**Theme 2**

Having acknowledged the history of these forms of urban nature, we will try to analyse and deconstruct, from a sociological and economic viewpoint, the social demand for “nature in the city”. Where is this “demand” produced and discussed? How is the public realm shaped by different investigations and survey methods of the social sciences? We have already emphasised the social competence of the aesthetic consideration of these natural spaces in the urban environment.24 Deeper analysis is also needed of the controversies surrounding these spaces – e.g. urban gardens – and which have emerged since the evolution of their designation – working, shared, familiar or community gardens, open spaces, neighbourhood green spaces, etc. Another fundamental goal is to contextualise the elaboration of these projects of urban nature, in light of the savoir-faire and scientific knowledge that gather together within them.

From a socio-economic viewpoint, what are the land-uses conflicts connected to “naturality” of urban or peri-urban spaces? From analysis of those conflicts, can we deduce new models...

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21 On urban agriculture, see Pierre Donadieu and André Fleury, « L’agriculture, une nature pour la ville ? », Les Annales de la Recherche Urbaine, n°74, op.cit. For agriurbanism, see Roland Vidal and André Fleury, « La place de l’agriculture dans la métropole verte », Projets de paysage, URL: http://www.projetsdepaysage.fr/fr/la_place_de_l_agriculture_dans_la_metropole_verte


of governance for the city, with regards to its land? What are the economic issues connected to the **becoming of these pieces of urban nature** that cities search to acquire?

**Theme 3**

After the historical legacy has been reconstructed, together with the social and economic motivations that support urban nature, we will try to explore a contiguous research pathway. The latter concerns both the range and impact of *ecological notions* and the *theoretico-practical* speculations inherent to landscape studies, with regards to the design of nature in the city and the nature of the city\(^{25}\). Indeed, we may evaluate the resilience of cities, their capacity to support biodiversity in resisting natural risks and aggressions which originate from human activities. Public policies concerning landscape and their stakeholders – populations, politicians, professionals of urban management and planning - never really consider this criterion. Should we accuse the models of urban nature which operate in professional education? Nevertheless, we are not lacking in concepts and notions for re-thinking together the city and nature, especially in recognising landscape as a *value*, a *resource* and a *common good*. Should we imagine a re-foundation of the professions that shape and produce our daily livelihood? What kinds of reforms, with regards to pedagogy and research, would allow the construction of a common education system for these diversified professions?

**Theme 4**

To go deeper into this crosscutting approach to ecology and landscape architecture, with regards to *aesthetics* and *scientific mediation*, we will consider the urban landscape in light of the living systems which compose it, and, more specifically, of its vegetal component. Under which conditions may the energetic dynamics inherent to the maintaining of the biosphere be supported by landscaping processes and activities? Most landscaping practices seem to be concerned by the appearance of urban sustainability and establish what we may deem as a merely architectural *greenwashing*\(^{26}\). But do landscape projects exist – realised or not - which authentically contribute to the implementation of the *energetic dimension of sustainability*? Are these projects or project strategies able to establish authentic relationships between designed spaces and living systems, while, at the same time, renewing the aesthetics of cities? May we consider the inappropriate character of the theoretical and practical tools of landscape architecture for evaluating and translating the complexity of our everyday landscapes of energy\(^{27}\) as being at the origin of this difficulty in understanding and managing it, both from the designer’s and the inhabitant’s point of view? Which scientific and aesthetic media – maps, for example – would support landscape architect work in formulating proactive strategies for designing a *sustainable urban nature*, together with social stakeholders\(^{28}\)?


\(^{27}\) Daniela Perrotti, « Conceiving the (everyday) landscape of energy as a transcalar infrastructural device », *Projets de paysage*, 2012. URL : [http://www.projetsdepaysage.fr/fr/conceiving_the_everyday_landscape_of_energy_as_a_transcalar_infrastructural_device](http://www.projetsdepaysage.fr/fr/conceiving_the_everyday_landscape_of_energy_as_a_transcalar_infrastructural_device)

\(^{28}\) For the idea that urbanism and urban issues are not only the question of design and planning professions, see Thierry Paquot, *L’Urbanisme, c’est notre affaire*, Nantes, L’Atalante, 2010. On the connection between urbanism and environment, see Thierry Paquot and Chris Younès, *Philosophie de l’environnement et milieux urbains*, Paris, éd. de La Découverte, coll. Armillaire, 2010.
We will focus on the issues of aesthetics and scientific mediation from the perspective of environmental ethics. From a moral point of view, plants have much more to say than simple greenwashing! Indeed, we talk about sustainability and about the end of an unlimited process of growth for human societies only through acknowledgment of the necessary commitment both to our physic and social environment – (milieu) - to its resources and integrity. Through living systems and energy, a landscape of values may be outlined; these values do not only concern the practitioners of planning and design, but every single social actor, as responsible dweller or city-user of his own urban environment. To what extent is urban nature, in its living dimension, an injunction to recognize the values that build an urban world?

Theme 5
In order to envisage the becoming of our cities with regards to nature, we will address the issue of a new coalition between nature and city. We won’t refrain from returning to previous phases of our research pathway, in order to better acknowledge the four presented themes. Several key elements contribute to reformulating this coalition: new urban models founded on nature, sociological approaches to the social demand for urban nature, the re-foundation of landscape design, at one scientifically, aesthetically and ethically oriented, with a view to meeting most efficiently the energy needs of inhabitants.

Nevertheless, we still wish to consider another hypothesis. As the history of architecture is deeply connected to the emergence of new building materials, it is perhaps through the renewal of materials which constitute urban nature that cities show their degree of innovation. The materials peculiar to urban environment - propres à l’urbain - as the landscape architect Michel Corajoud defined them, are perhaps not as “natural” or “living” as he imagined.

The goal is then to highlight this innovation, in order to contribute to the definition of a meta-disciplinary approach to landscape studies concerning urban environment. As innovation has contributed to the scientific establishment and renovation of architectural design, we will try to focus on the history and transformational processes of these green materials, before and after their utilisation in situ. Where are the green materials conceived, i.e. composite or inert materials that designers use in constructing the urban nature? Who or what is responsible for their creation, and within which industrial systems and trade networks are they built and then commercialised? How may we observe and take account of the innovations shared across the production of green materials, urban nature and the nature of the city?

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**Registration, proposal submission and schedule**
The registration fee for the symposium is 100 Euros for speakers with an academic or professional background, and 50 Euros for student speakers. Fee includes conference materials and lunches during the two days of symposium. Symposium participation is free for non-speakers from the wider public, within the limits of conference hall capacity, but the registration is compulsory.

Proposals may be submitted in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and papers will be given in their original language with a visual support (format ppt or pdf) in French or in English. Submitted proposal will include a title, an abstract of 300-400 words, 5 key-words,
the author’s name, email address, and details on academic, institutional or professional affiliation. Proposals should explicitly refer to one of the 5 presented symposium themes. The email address for proposal submission and wider public registration is NUPcontacts@gmail.com, the contact reference is Daniela Perrotti.

The deadline for submitting proposals is Thursday 1st November 2012. After evaluation from the Scientific Committee, authors will be informed whether their proposal has been accepted or not on the 1st December 2012.

The symposium will be held in Paris on the 7th and 8th February 2013. Conference proceedings will be published at the end of 2013. Full papers of selected proposals should be submitted by 1st April 2013 to the Organising Committee.

http://natureurbaineenprojets.blogspot.fr/p/colloque-international-nature-urbaine.html