

# Ways of the ‘Living City’ to Regenerate Life in Weakened Neighbourhoods

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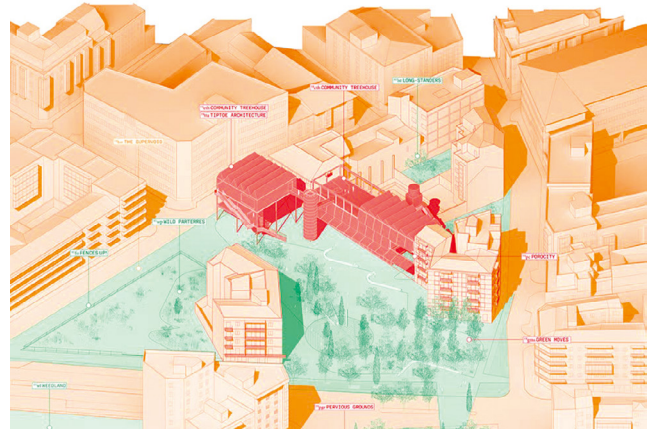
The act of regeneration is at the core of the ‘Living City’: all the sites of this site family are neighbourhoods suffering from a lack of vitality. In Madrid (ES), a network of residual spaces at the core of the Carabanchel district require to be transformed into a regenerative interface to host a renewed social and cultural life; in Regensburg (DE), Leipzig (DE) and Schorsmolen (NL) the neighbourhoods are considered as devitalized or even dangerous places to live in: actions are needed both in terms of architectural interventions and of public space strategies in order to reconnect with more dynamic networks and to enhance communities life. Finally, in Etten-Leur (NL) the transformation of a massive shopping centre – the heritage of an outdated way of designing cities – is about to be transformed into a vivid meeting place for the neighbourhood towards new ways of ‘consuming’ and living together. Throughout the winning projects, we identified three ways to regenerate life – specifically associated to the ‘Living City’ shifts. The two firsts relate in a synergistic way to the ability to empower both nature and communities. The winning teams invite us to give them more space and resources by developing new strategies and tools to regenerate the living conditions. The third way results from the two firsts: teams are building new references regarding the different ways new commons for the living (humans and more-than-humans) can be shaped, both in terms of spaces and values.

## Empowering Nature

The living city requires to think more in terms of subtraction rather than of addition. The *no-more-asphalt* policy is gaining power and serves the renaturation of soils, the restoration of ecological continuities, and the massive plantation of trees. Runner-up project *Common Soil* in Leipzig (fig. 1) is all about that. The project seeks to fill the gaps between existing and isolated green islands in order to create a continuous green corridor. Moreover, the team is giving the soil an important social function for the neighbourhood, as they plan to make it a link between communities in order to strengthen the coexistence of all local residents. In addition, and towards a process-oriented development of the neighbourhood, the team proposes to implement a vertical tree nursery that plays an essential role: on one hand, it is used to grow plants and trees to be planted in time, using time as a productive agent of the transformation; and on the other, the simple scaffolding structure becomes

a public observatory of the progressive mutation of the neighbourhood. Empowering nature strategies also calls for a new contract regarding unbuilt places and the economic pressure of densification.

Among the shifts of the 'Living City', wastelands and residual spaces are not perceived as places to fill up anymore, but to preserve as biodiversity shelters. Runner-up project *Wasteland-Scapes* in Madrid offers a leading manifesto: a prospective inventory of wasteland fragments dedicated to be consolidated and networked within the neighbourhood as refuges for nature (fig 2). By detailing the inner qualities of these 'empty' spaces, the team addresses a change of gaze regarding the existence and potentialities for an urban ecology. They are underlining – and anticipating – the risk of transforming the inventory as prior targets for urban densification. Indeed, they are promoting John Dewey's 'valuation' philosophy to avoid a financial 'valorisation' of land. By building the values of the wasteland as a precious vacant lot to remain empty, pervious, fertile, green, porous and accessible they are thinking of the vacancy not as ground for a future building, but as a potential for a unique kind of public space. To achieve this goal, the team imagines a new kind of agreement between the built and the void, whereby the essential traits of wasteland – informality, fertility, strangeness, ambiguity, emptiness, opportunity, fluctuation – become tactics to dignify the vacant lots, as well as guidelines to develop them.

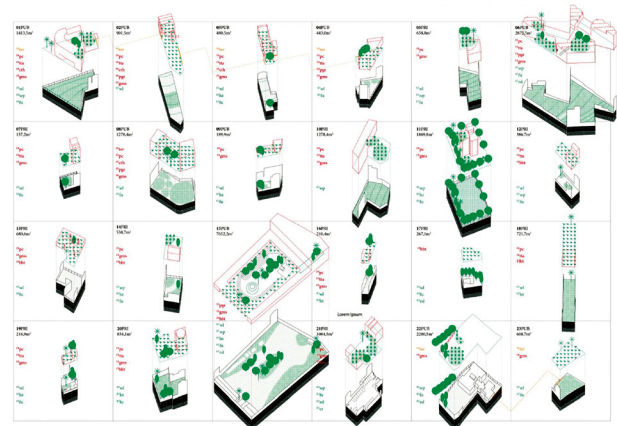


Uncscious Places

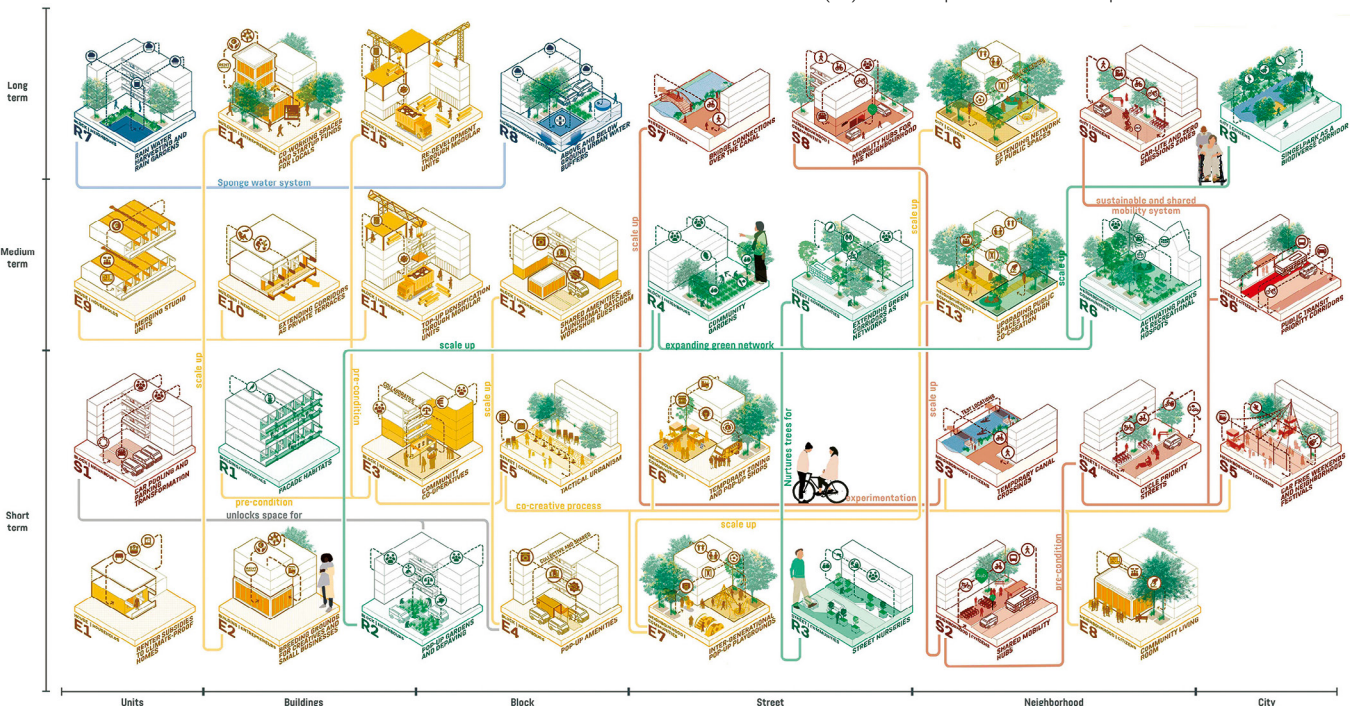
The Value of the Wasteland

### Empowering Communities

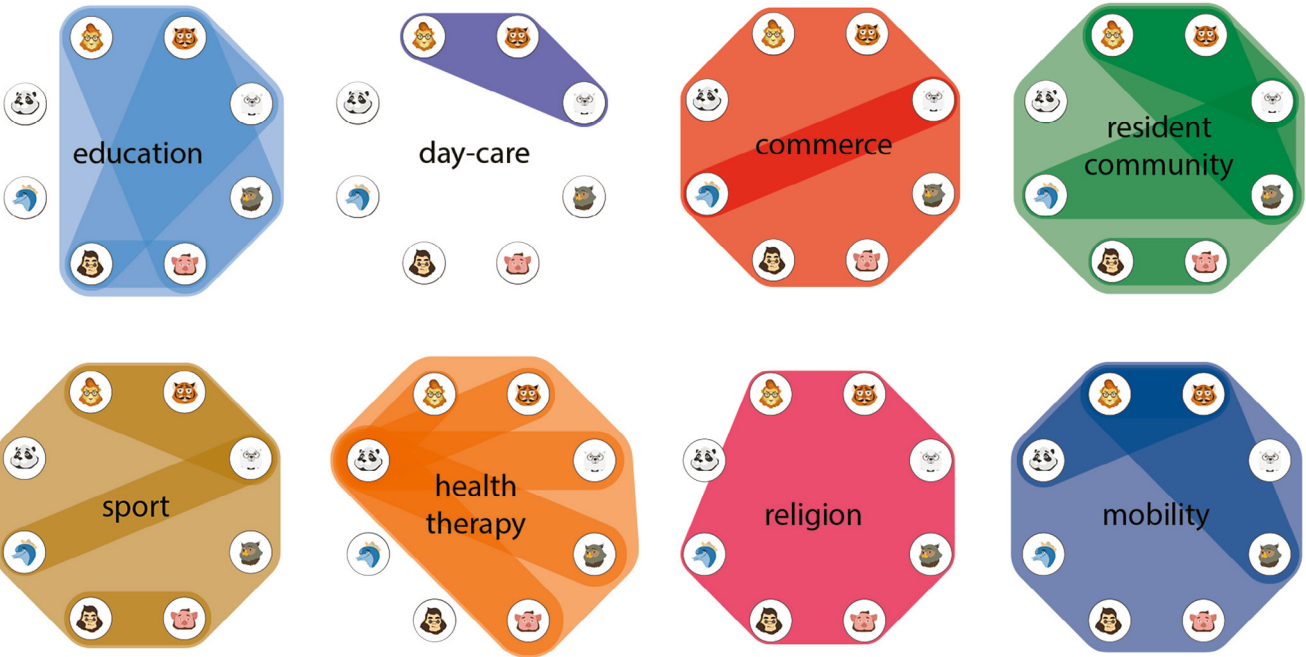
By means of empowering the living, we are thinking of the interweaving of re-naturation processes and the reinforcement of social ecosystems as joint driving forces to regenerate life in devitalized neighbourhoods. Following Judith Butler's guidelines, the empowerment of communities is particularly at stake in special mention project *Nurturing Schorsmolen* in Schorsmolen. In fact, the team is developing regenerative strategies dedicated to giving more agency to people. More than helping them to *inhabit* in better conditions, they are helping them to *transform* their daily environments by themselves (fig 3). To do so, and to transcend the 'curse of anonymity', they are focusing on how they can empower citizens to shape their own cities. For them, it starts by developing a sense



2 – Madrid (ES), runner-up – *Wasteland-Scapes* > See more P.146



3 – Schorsmolen (NL), special mention – *Nurturing Schorsmolen* > See more P.167



of place and for that, they propose a specific 'action kit' in order to plan short-, medium-, and long-term actions, ranging from building communities, building transformations and ultimately, building a living Schorsmolen. From public spaces activation and transformation to architectural interventions, they are scoping a range of tactical urban planning tools, like the neighbourhood festival that functions as an experimental platform to gather and act for the progressive rewriting of their own narratives and environments. In short, the team is perceiving the project as a socio-spatial framework to co-create a liveable future.

### Shaping New Commons

A renewed idea of the 'Commons' is at work within the living city shifts. To revitalize neighbourhoods, the hypothesis of generating a sense of belonging – together – is crucial and demands to identify what to share, with whom and how to shape spatially and in time these restored relations. Runner-up project *25 fragments* in Regensburg presents an interesting attitude for it. The team explores the concept of fragments by contemplating the intrinsic nature of disconnected places and diverse groups. By discovering these fragments, they seek to connect or gather them and sometimes daringly separate them to give shape to new possibilities. The various and creative combination of 8 groups of people and 8 fragmented elements of programs that make a neighbourhood healthy and dynamic – education, care, commerce, resident community, sports, health, religion and mobility – generates 25 innovative fragments that triggers the re-shaping of the living environment (fig.4). These 25 fragments become the essence of the project and are spread at various scales: the scale of the city and of the neighbourhood and finally, inside the buildings. The regenerative strategy

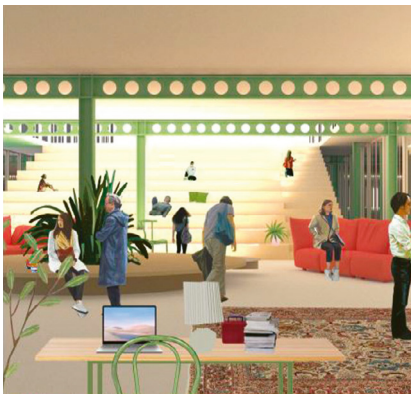
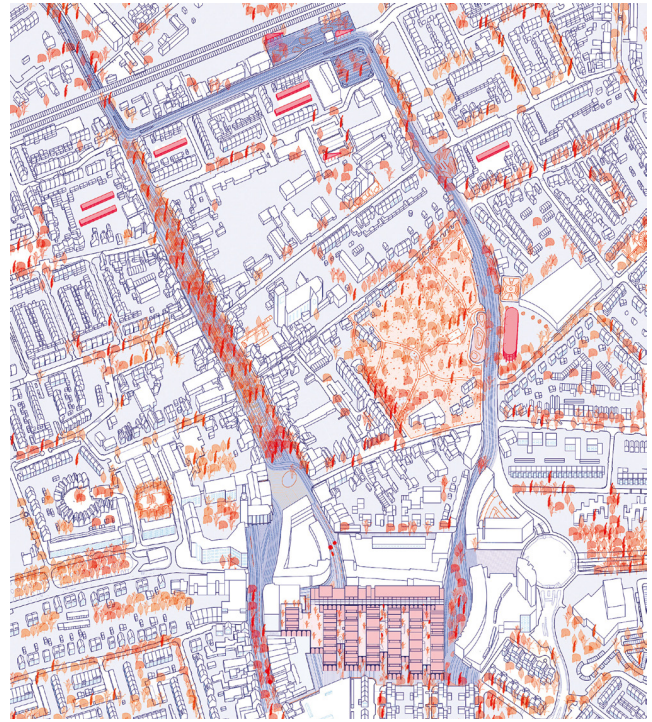


4 – Regensburg (DE), runner-up – 25 fragments > See more P.158

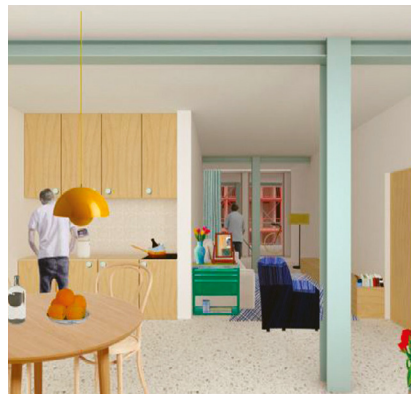
is driven by the implementation and transformation of the existing through these fragments: to shape new commons.

Beyond fragments, winning project *Future Nostalgia* in Etten-Leur is carried out by the quest of new 'living patterns' driven by a feeling of nostalgia – specifically provoked by the uncertainty of the future. To do so, the team developed three strategies to transform the existing shopping mall and its surroundings: 'on top', 'in between' and 'on void' (fig.5). The first prototype of 'on top' densification consists in the reusing of the large commercial structures and the addition of a hybrid infrastructure suitable for housing and community spaces. The second 'on void' approach reclaims the huge parking lots to reactivate them as a hybrid and vibrant public space. The final 'in-between' approach seeks to break up large private courtyards by retrofitting and fragmenting gardens into smaller human spaces. Besides the re-shaping of living patterns and commons, it is the values and purposes of spaces that are shifted by the winners. Indeed, they are designing ways of experimenting life more than consumption, as they say: 'from man understood as a pure consumer to man as a social animal'.

The E17 rewarded projects draw ways of regeneration of weakened neighbourhoods that illuminates the new paradigms of the living city. Beyond demolition or unreasonable densification, they guide us towards an extended vision of the potentialities of the existing. They are trying to repair the broken structures of the built environment instead of erasing; to restore an urban ecology that functions as a regenerative spine for all instead of artificializing soils and milieus; and to reconnect places and people by empowering them instead of ignoring. Beyond spatial shifts, it is the attitude of professionals that are deeply shifted in order to give more agency to nature and people. They seek to equip environments so that they can continue to transform themselves and to enable possibilities to emerge.



interior view - urban condenser



interior view - housing



interior view - public spaces

