BEYOND THE *GREEN NEW DEAL*.
CONTEMPORARY DESIGN STRATEGIES AND EMERGING AESTHETICS
IN TIMES OF URBAN TRANSITIONS

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ABSTRACT

In the perspective of contemporary urban design practices on environmental rebalancing, a fragmented conceptual framework emerges, where technicism seems the only approach which could provide concrete results vis-à-vis the crisis we are currently experiencing. Instead, the proposed contribution shifts the reflection on the reasons for an aesthetic experience that poses the revival of uncontrolled Nature at the core of the urban scene. The relationship between City-Architecture-Nature is critically interpreted through the design positions of the Modern and the Contemporary, to highlight a new immersive attitude, where sensorial becomes a specific feature in the development of current urban dwelling.

Keywords: urban Renaturation, transition, architectural aesthetics, sensoriality

OLTRE IL *NUOVO GREEN DEAL*.
STRATEGIE PROGETTUALI CONTEMPORANEE ED ESTETICHE EMERGENTI
PER LA TRANSIZIONE URBANA

SINTESI

Osservando il panorama contemporaneo del progetto urbano sul tema del riequilibrio ambientale, emerge un quadro concettuale frammentato, in cui l'apporto tecnicista sembra l'unico apparentemente in grado di dare risposte concrete alla crisi che viviamo. Il contributo proposto, invece, sposta volutamente la riflessione sulle ragioni di un'esperienza estetica che vede il dirompente ritorno sulla scena urbana di una Natura incontrollata. Il rapporto Città-Architettura-Natura è presentato attraverso la rilettura critica di alcune posizioni del Moderno e del Contemporaneo, per evidenziare un atteggiamento nuovo, immersivo, in cui il dato sensoriale costituisce uno specifico carattere progettuale nella costruzione presente dell'abitare urbano.

Parole chiave: rinaturalizzazione urbana, transizione, estetica architettonica, sensorialità

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CONTEXT & POSITION

The New Urban Agenda and the European Green Deal: from policies to design strategies

On a global scale, contemporary political and public agendas enforce common decision-making processes towards more sustainable development. Indeed, the formal adoption of the 2030 Agenda (UNS, 2015) fosters concrete actions and shared policies through the formulations of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), i.e. 17 key issues defining structural transitions to be shared worldwide. Among them, the SDGs address the need to overcome the environmental conditions affecting the world regions' habitability, including the right to access to natural resources and protect them (UN-Habitat et al., 2018); the urgency for sustainable and transit-oriented mobility, and a significant change in urban development towards a zero-carbon society in terms of energy supply. Moreover, the United Nations Summits of New York and Paris (UNFCCC, 2015) marked a global step on contrasting Climate Change effects by explicitly posing policy obligations signed by 174 participating countries (Dimitrov, 2016, 1).

> In this unprecedented era of increasing urbanization, and in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, and other global development agreements and frameworks, we have reached a critical point in understanding that cities can be the source of solutions to, rather than the cause of, the challenges that our world is facing today. (Clos, 2015, IV)

In this perspective, urban structural transitions enlighten a conceptual frame[1] primarily focused on conceiving the embodiment of this paradigmatic shift and its spatial impact on the urban realm. Arguing that spatial forms are direct consequences of social and economic constructs, the concretion of the Modern city appears, according to Iturbe, as "*a complex network of interlocking carbon forms, each of which replicates the myth of a limitless supply of energy and resources that is characteristic of a carbon-fueled culture of abundance*" (Iturbe, 2019, 13). The legacy of the XX century, with the remanences of its vast infrastructure networks and expanded peri-urban fields, has left inefficient and neglected urbanized areas affected by noise, emissions, physical barriers, low spatial quality, social deprivation and high economic costs (Shannon & Smets, 2010). Beyond the urgency of rethinking recent urbanization characterized by the strategy of an endless structural expansion,[2] we need to engage urban systems, as the spatial forms of present times, through emerging concepts such as adaptability to systemic transitions (Holling, 1978). Moreover, in doing so, we need to overcome current paradigms that still rely on the legacy from the past. It is not about changing them, rather creating another one.[3] In facing these pressures, how does the architectural project react? What is the challenge in trying to go beyond stale replicas of worlds inevitably, and under the eyes of all, lost? What does (urban) design in times of transitions[4] mean?

At a European level, the adoption of the Pact of Amsterdam[5] in 2016 and the European Green Deal[6] in 2019 represent the enhancement of proper policy-oriented actions by constructing a shared framework through the widespread participation of institutions, cultural and economic stakeholders, and citizens.[7] Precisely the establishment of a common policy framework has proved to be highly incisive on the physical transformation of cities and metropolitan areas. Rather than abstract policies, indeed, these choices are currently defining future cities' profiles. Several metropolitan areas have already adopted action plans to promote urban transitions, with a specific reference to adaptive strategies for climate change, profoundly directing the design discourse at reintegrating Nature in urbanscapes.[8]

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1   About the interdisciplinary approach to urban transition, see Bulkeley & Betsill (2003). About specific interdisciplinary design approach, see Sijmons (2014).

2   Reference is to the work of Henri Lefebvre, in specific to his research on Urban Revolution. Another recent study is *The Endless City*, directed by Richard Burdett and Deyan Sudjic for the London School of Economics and Political Science, published in 2007. See also: Merrifield (2013).

3   Paraphrasing the words of Greta Thunberg at UN COP24 in 2018: "*And if solutions within the system are so impossible to find, maybe we should change the system itself.*"

4   Similar topics have been recently discussed within the International Seminar *Design Actions in Urban Transitions. Architectural and Urban Design for Shifting Conditions*, hosted by the Politecnico di Milano on 30th October 2018, with the participation of six European universities, TU Delft, Polithecnika Warsawska, University of Ljubljana, NTU Athens, University of Antwerp, Politecnico di Milano.

5   The *Pact of Amsterdam*, the Urban Agenda policy for European Union, has been published on May 2016 (Pact of Amsterdam, 2016). See also UN-Habitat et al. (2018).

6   The European Green Deal was presented by the European Commission on December 2019 in Brussels (The European Green Deal, 2019).

7   "*In order to address the increasingly complex challenges in Urban Areas, it is important that Urban Authorities cooperate with local communities, civil society, businesses and knowledge institutions. Together they are the main drivers in shaping sustainable development with the aim of enhancing the environmental, economic, social and cultural progress of Urban Areas. EU, national, regional and local policies should set the necessary framework in which citizens, NGOs, businesses and Urban Authorities, with the contribution of knowledge institutions, can tackle their most pressing challenges.*" (Pact of Amsterdam, 2016, 4).

8   Some examples, among many others, are the *Rotterdam Climate Change Adaptation Strategy* in 2015, the *Paris Climate Action Plan* in 2016, or the *London Environment Strategy* in 2016, see https://resourcecentre.c40.org/ (last access: 28. 4. 2020).

Urban Renaturation[9] shapes a common ground for various design practices to support the urgent requests for environmental rebalancing inbuilt contexts. It highlights an increasing awareness in design disciplines and, in some cases, the prevalence of eco-technicist solutions on the clarity of cultural positions. Within this framework, it is possible to recognize different interdisciplinary approaches. The first one refers to the discipline of urban planning, translating governance and policy indications into strategic guidelines for sustainable development, often with clear impacts on the physical and spatial assets (Bulkeley & Betsill, 2003). The second one merges natural sciences and environmental landscape design, addressing ecosystem services to improve urban resilience through nature-based solutions (Kabisch et al., 2018) and enhancing the presence of new blue and green infrastructures within urban contexts. A third approach refers to urban and architectural design scale with a specific focus on the reconfiguration of contemporary open public spaces (Pollak, 2006), infrastructural leftovers (Nijhuis et al., 2015), or abandoned urban complexes (Bergevoet & van Tuijl, 2016), through reuse and adaptive strategies. However, a common feature often relies on performativity, where the main strategical choices do not question innovation and quality of the spatial experience, limiting the results evaluation to an almost quantitative level (Gandy, 2015; Verovšek & Čavić, 2017). The interlacing of ecology, politics, technology, and social behavior for the design of urban environments is often lacking a broader perspective. Indeed, when approaching sustainable development and adaptation strategies, architectural aesthetics are overlooked, when it could actually provide a significant contribution to the definition of a changing paradigm.

The paper proposes a broader reflection on the return of an uncontrolled Nature on the urban scene, stressing the potential of aesthetic reasonings. Firstly, the relationship between City-Architecture-Nature is critically considered through a discontinuity in the Modernity and Contemporary design positions.

It is meant to highlight a new immersive attitude, where *sensorial* becomes a specific design character for inhabiting the present urban realm. The main discussion focuses on specific qualitative analysis of contemporary design practices, that are able to combine the urgency of climate change adaptation strategies with the remodeling of our familiar imagery for experiencing urbanity. The double reflection, between theoretical positions and design strategies, is based on a transdisciplinary approach that links practice-based research with the speculative dimension related to architectural aesthetics. The qualitative analysis of selected case studies aims at extracting a potential general design reconceptualization. The assessment of such case studies is introduced by three interdisciplinary categories, that are commons, prototypes, and wilderness. The objective is to explore the potential of rebuilding Nature within our domestic urban landscapes, not just in terms of strategies and technical solutions, but mostly addressing its consequences on spatial quality and its perception.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From the ecstatic neutrality of the Nature to Sensorial Urbanism

When one looks at Nature through the glass walls of the Farnsworth House, it takes on a deeper significance than when one stands outside. More of Nature is thus expressed - it becomes part of a greater whole. (Norberg-Schulz, 1958, 40)

The Nature that builds the Farnsworth House walls, conceived by the architect Mies Van der Rohe from 1945 to 1951, is a Nature bent to the built form, interpreted by its architectural measurements, and decomposed through time and light (Figure 1, 2). Indeed, the appreciation of this boundless space, a fragile envelope of thin glass-walls, can be obtained just standing in the house while looking outside, as in Mies central-view perspective drawings: from the interior towards the natural landscape (Cohen, 1996).

Through a process of detachment and abstraction, Modern architecture, in the interpretation of one of its masters, establishes a direct connection with the exterior and, according to that, focuses on the totality of the object in relation to the environment conceived as ecstatic neutrality (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 1986). Modern discourse identifies the environment as a proper category of design in a dialectic but also conflictual position vis-à-vis architecture. It is the result of a decisive split between human work and natural context, while architecture and urban design acquire the awareness of a new rational artificiality due to techniques and production processes.[10] The

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9   *Urban Renaturation* refers to Ecological Restoration discipline, investing theoretical reflections and ongoing practices that ground on the renewed interrelation between urbanscape and Nature in an integrated approach, including trends and behaviors that affect all the social levels and reflect on design topics. The term describes a pervasive process of introducing the natural sphere within urban and metropolitan contexts beyond disciplinary compartments, present in contemporary architectural and urban design projects. Indeed, the role that natural environment takes nowadays within the city definitively exceeds the landscape sphere, referring to the presence of urban gardens and parks as practiced in XIX and XX centuries. It can be defined as specific contemporary process of urban naturalization. The term however differs from the north American meaning of "urban naturalization" that regards technical innovations to climate change effects, see https://www.london.ca/residents/Environment/Natural-Environments/Pages/Naturalization.aspx (last access: 30. 8. 2020). On the EU level, renaturation projects are related to the empowerment of nature-based solutions and social participation, see for example the H2020 report: https://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/index.cfm?pg=nbs (last access: 27. 7. 2020).

10 Reference is to the critical readings on Modern of Manfredo Tafuri, for example Tafuri (1977).

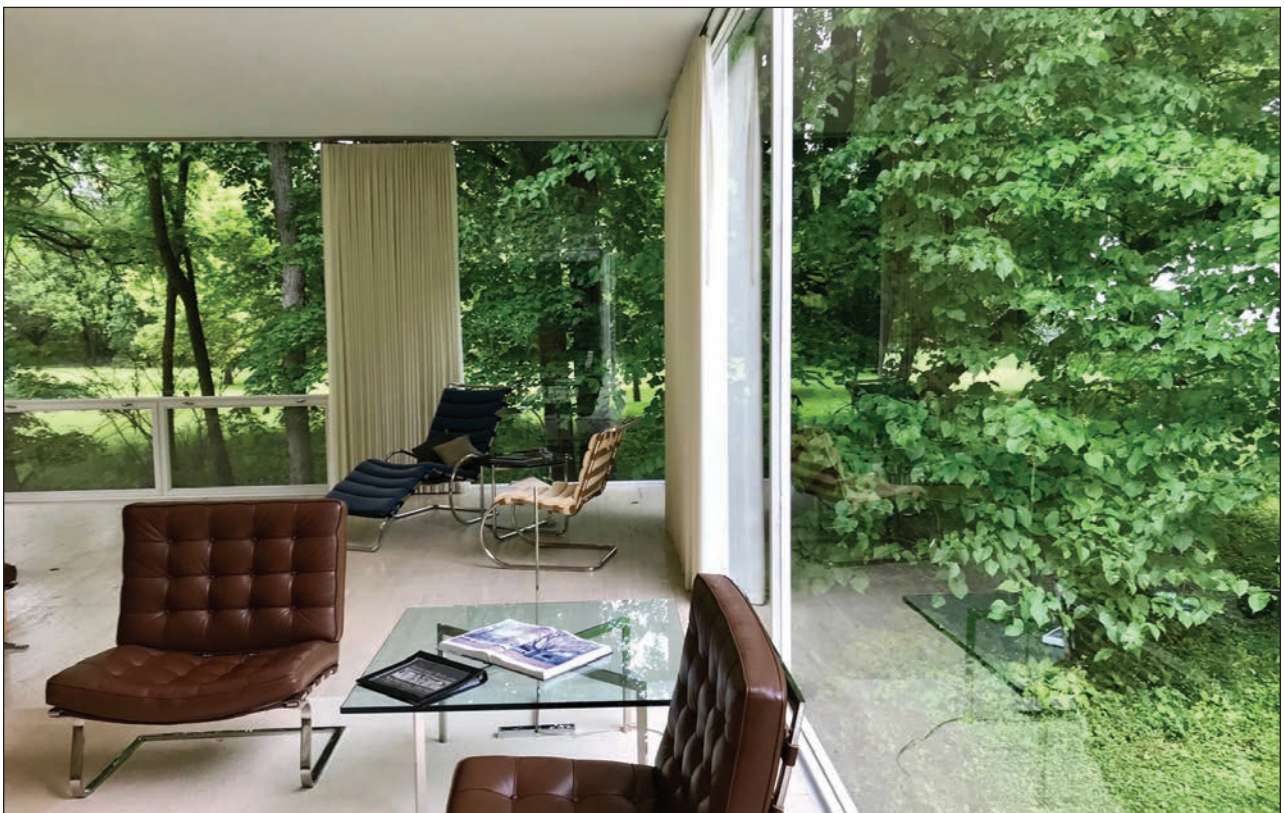*Figure 1, 2: Farnsworth House, Mies van de Rohe, Plano 1951 (Photo: Timothy Brown; Phil Beard; CC, Flickr).*

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characters of this detachment find in some figures, particularly in some architectural works, exemplary features not to provide solutions, rather to highlight the aesthetic attitude behind what can be defined as one of the main cultural issues of the time: how to deal with Nature.

It must be possible to solve the task of controlling nature and yet simultaneously create a new freedom. (Van de Rohe, 1928)

According to Mies, Architecture must create conditions for new freedom, as it is intended as a work of necessity built through the understanding and the expression of the époque, and his contemporary époque grounds on a precise program:

The whole program […] consisted in establishing the new forms of the relationship between the house and the nature, considering the house itself as part of the nature that is a complementary part of human life. […] The contemporary city, with its infrastructures, seems to allow, at least theoretically, the ancient dream to equip the nature to be inhabited. (Monestiroli, 1984, 9)

Therefore, the interior perspectives of Mies convey the idea of an irreducible truth, regarding the stasis and the durability of architecture as the first act of disciplinary autonomy with reference to the environment as the counterpart, i.e. the beloved and fearsome Nature (Padovan, 2001).

Similarly, as to the construction of the city, the battle engaged by Le Corbusier on the unhinging of the compact form and the antithesis between City and Nature remains exemplary and highly decisive for the consequences in planning and urban design experiences to come. The central assumption, underlying his theoretical formulations, moves from the observation of a necessary re-foundation of modern Urbanism: the XX century, as the present time, is based on mechanic circulation, where the city claims for a structural rethinking of its semantics.

Urbanism will quite with rue-corridor as today, and across the path of new developments will create, on a larger scale, the architectural symphony that has to be realized. The rue-corridor with two sidewalks, suffocated by high houses, must disappear. The cities have the right to be more than many buildings with many corridors. Urbanism claims for uniformity in details and movements in whole. (Le Corbusier, 1924, 35)

The rule of the modern city construction consists in the functional reorganization of social life translated in precise

design issues: density related to the recognition of different architectural dwelling typologies; artificialization of nature that reflects the reintroduction of the natural environment recaptured to the city as leisure equipment provision; and circulation, finally, that structures the urban frame acquiring three-dimensionality and depth, once it is freed from the physical constraint of the tissues. The extreme idealization and the pictorial character of the environment as contemplative background are quite relevant features of the relation between City and Nature, as recognizable by the positions proposed. Looking at those models, today, they clearly show a limit, but at the same time, they represent an essential step where design approaches Nature as the counter-element of architectural research. Mies identifies a binomial that nowadays becomes increasingly crucial, establishing the level of investigation on the poetic interdependence between Architecture and Environment. Over the last decades, the architectural design research progressively moved from the Modernist notion of environment as openness, as a counter element of the built fabric or a neutral space equipped to be inhabited, to that of a hyper-characterized environment (Goodbun et al., 2012) continuously shaped by new social reinterpretations and processes of re-signification (Berlingieri, 2018).

Is it possible to combine the different approaches to contemporary urbanism with a 'sensorial urbanism', capable of offering a broader understanding of urban settings, interested in describing the character and atmosphere of places, and aiming to contribute to a new definition of public space? (Zardini, 2015, 63)

The outlined position challenges the existence of an alternative perspective of signification that aims at rethinking a close relationship between thought and poetic image. Among others, Zardini clearly states the fact that climate change and architectural design are not only dealing with an eco-technical problem of rebalancing, but they are the new witnesses of a more profound phenomenon of urban renaturation. The latter deals with sensoriality and wilderness, offering alternatives and still unexplored ideas on how common spaces can be reassessed by architectural and urban design. The most relevant experiences that are currently reshaping the XX century ideal antithetic relation, from a semantic point of view, insist on the importance to conceive a new co-inhabitance between the uncontrolled natural status of the environment with the one of the artifice, order and physical control that still organize and embody the imagery of urban and metropolitan contexts.[11]

Gardening and landscape planning deal with the same domain but are different discipli-

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11 About the binomial City-Nature, an interesting interpretation comes from the philosophical reflections about the different meanings and conceptualizations of "landscape" and "nature", see Rocca (2020).

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Figure 3: Serpentine Gallery Pavillion, Peter Zumthor and Piet Oudolf, London 2011 (Photo: Loz Pycock; CC, Wikimedia Commons).

nes. That is the key point. As the 'scape' in landscape indicates, landscape planning is a scenic art and a visual methodology. The planner stands 'outside' the landscape and visually manipulates it. In gardening, on the other hand, no privileged position from which a 'planner' observes and manipulates the scenery exists. The 'gardener' is always inside the garden. (Kuma, 1997, 49)

Kengo Kuma in his essay *Gardening vs Architecture* further argues that:

The gardener, however, is forever detained in the garden. [...] There is no distance between him and the garden. There can be no temporal 'point' where a goal is reached, and completion is achieved. There is no completion for a garden. Time continues to flow forever. In gardening, everything is continuous – the environment and the object; the subject and the object, time, and the world. (Kuma, 1997, 49)

The change of perspective lies in the passage from the modern ideology of distance, and of environment as neutral space, to that of the embedded, a passage sharply taking place in the blurry limits between physical and virtual reality as a consequence of new pervasive technologies. Similar is for the physical design of urban spaces, where the terms character, atmosphere, sensoriality denote

a new behavior, an aesthetic experience based on closeness, immersion, and the disappearing of distances in conceiving spatial meanings (Figure 3). The discontinuity of Modern and Contemporary (design) cultural positions stands also in their form of representation: from the bird-eye perspective of Le Corbusier and the central view of Mies, losing the capacity to describe the world we live, to a new interior view that is non-hierarchical, temporary, and unstable.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Contemporary urban design practices and emerging aesthetics

The main discussion presents a selection of case studies focusing on precise urban design strategies that deal with climate change adaptation and urban transition toward sustainable development, specifically investigating into the reconfiguration of open urban spaces in metropolitan conditions.

Within the contemporary panorama, made of a plurality of approaches and argumentations (see Context & Position), three accounts are recognized when dealing with reinterpreting Nature back to the urban scene. They are defined by the interdisciplinary categories of commons, prototype, and wilderness. The first one relates to commons.[12]

This topic reintroduces the necessity to attribute a socio-environmental value to shared goods regarding the protection of soil, water, air, and the primary resources to be preserved and enhanced in the design of open public spaces. It also relates to a sort of permanent status of negotiation between different actors, such as public bodies, citizens, and developers, where open spaces are currently at the core of the public debate.

Within the idea of a shared asset, the reintroduction of Nature in urban open spaces assumes the symbolic form of compensation in re-establishing the necessary ecological structures to support and upgrade urban environment. In that sense, design practices often combine social inclusion and ecological approach by giving back vacant and abandoned places to the community, residual or lost along the urban expansion timeline. They become places that exacerbate the potential variety of usages by multiplying the functional solutions towards environmental transitions, as in the case of the Water square Benthemplein[13] in Rotterdam (Figure 4, 5). The water square combines environmental purposes of water storage, to improve the

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12 Regarding the conceptual framework and design strategies of commons see as references Borch & Kornberger (2015). More general references are to Ostrom (1990) and Chipperfield (2012).

13 See http://www.urbanisten.nl/wp/?portfolio=waterplein-benthemplein (last access: 8. 5. 2020).

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quality and the social meaning of public space in peripheral neighborhoods. Most of the time, the water square is a recreational and dynamic place for the local community participating in the design process. The water appears as an essential element in the spatial organization of the square, both as rainwater transported via large stainless-steel gutters into the basins, and as a water wall and rain well. Once collected in underground infiltration devices, water helps to maintain the vegetation during dry seasons. The typology research, first presented at the IABR in 2005, became official policy for the city vision on water management in 2007, the *Rotterdam Waterplan 2*, followed by pilot studies and the first experiment in Benthemsquare. The project, completed by De Urbanisten in 2013, today constitutes one of the first European examples of urban design where spatial flexibility follows an adaptive strategy to climate change dynamics (Berlingieri & Triggianese, 2019). Moreover, the environment becomes evident in the project because of water visibility as the main compositional element of the square. At the same time, it also represents a means for the place's aesthetic experience in a powerful combination with its social value.

Another representative case is the Luchtsingel pedestrian bridge[14] in Rotterdam. This bottom-up initiative started in 2012 with the construction of the first public infrastructure promoted by inhabitants' crowdfunding (Figure 6, 7). The experiment, launched by the design studio ZUS (Zones Urbaines Sensibles), was created to reconnect three disaggregated districts in the heart of the city. Starting from the pedestrian bridge crossing the railway line in the city center, the project has achieved greater importance and involvement for both inhabitants and the municipality. Between 2012 and 2018, the redevelopment of the Schieblock office tower, a new incubator for growing businesses, and the creation of the Dakakker (Figure 8), a shared agricultural rooftop, were completed together with the regeneration of surroundings open spaces. Finally, the Pompenburg park and the former Hofplein station roof, on the other side of the Luchtsingel, are currently under development to be used as green spaces and venues for events. Beyond the "socio-green transformation" of the neighborhood, the project explores the possibility of alternative urbanism based on the concept of permanent temporality (ZUS, 2016). It is based on the idea that, as a design feature of transition, the contemporary city must progressively change through partial and temporary adaptive solutions.

Just like other living systems, the urban system forms itself over time. Therefore, the ability to deal with the unforeseen events and uncertainty in an important strength. Sustainable urban development is made possible by leaving things open instead of pinning them down – not instant urban development, but incremental and adaptive urban development. This creates a city of permanent temporality, a city that permanently develops through temporary interventions. (ZUS, 2016, 307)

The Luchtsingel project combines the enhancement of natural spaces within the urban fabric, i.e. infrastructural leftovers and underused or abandoned buildings, with active social participation by the crowdfunding initiative that supported the first stage as a bottom-up process. Beyond that, it promotes a new "way of doing" that fosters a permanent and temporary development of the urban (public) realm, a clear position that also introduces the topic of urban prototyping[15].

The interest toward this category relies on the capacity of a progressive model making, not only due to temporality but to the possibility of constant manipulations on the urban model, also based on opensource design practices, where the results are provisional, an intermediate status between urban policies and their spatial translation, constantly undergoing updating procedures. The emerging character signs a key passage from a thinking model based on visions to another based on the concreteness of measurable results. It raises a sort of inability to incardinate the single project within a broader picture; hence the public space becomes a sort of corollary of practical examples (Bergevoet & van Tuijl, 2016), a toolbox of design instruments addressed to non-standard customization of open urban spaces.

Indeed, regeneration processes and the requalification of open public spaces represent exponential challenges in urban and metropolitan conditions, where cities claim a more general reframing of planning strategies of adaptation and mitigation for climate change effects.[16] However, large-scale visions are replaced by general strategic guidelines, while design proposals present themselves as real prototypes, addressing ecological balances through practice-based experiments and discrete adjustments (Valente, 2016). Moreover, the double register of large-scale strategies and small or mid-scale interventions often do not speak the same language, generating a kind of schizophrenia in the

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14 For more information: https://www.area-arch.it/the-luchtsingel/ (last access: 8. 5. 2020).

15 For references on urban prototyping see Verebes (2016); Verebes (2013). For a more general overview of the interlacing between new technologies and urban design, in an era of open-source and cocreation, see Ratti (2014).

16 See, for example, the case of *New York City Climate Strategic Plan* at http://onenyc.cityofnewyork.us/ (last access: 8. 5. 2020).

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Figure 4, 5: Water Square Benthemplein, De Urbanisten, Rotterdam 2013 (Photo: Yağız Söylev).

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Figure 6, 7: Luchtsingel bridge and the Hofplein station, ZUS, Rotterdam 2015 (Photo: F. Berlingieri).

concretion of un-dialoguing ecological fragments. Indeed, they no longer need to demonstrate profound relations with the urban locus, if not resulting in a contextual disengagement while strongly projected towards technological innovations (Berlingieri, 2018).

According to that, several ongoing projects are based on actions of urban reforestation for reducing air pollution and CO_2 emissions but also contrasting heat waves and the increase of seasonal high temperatures in cities. Examples are the masterplan Parc aux Angeliques[17] conceived by Michel Desvign between 2010 and 2017 for the right bank of Bordeaux, or large urban areas depaving actions to increase soil permeability against rainfalls, such as the recent project Parco della Biblioteca degli Alberi in Milan. This is a significant regeneration project that installs a green heart as a reconnection of three different neighborhoods in Porta Nuova. Such experiences are profoundly changing the image of the contemporary city, especially in Europe,

with the introduction of new environmental restoration techniques, i.e. nature-based solutions (Kabisch et al., 2018), or the use of technological devices in order to get quantitative responses to transformation processes for new sustainable developments (Ratti & Claudel, 2016). The result is a progressive and innovative modification of the role of public space that overwrites the existing urban pattern as an integrated environmental system. Moreover, within the prototype category, various practices are expanding the use of big data, sensors, computation, and robotics within design processes (Buš, 2019). New technological devices become relevant components to set measurable evidence for ecological and social requests, a sort of equation between creative processes and quantifiable results.

An interesting case is the technological design-based practice of Studio Roosengaarde. The studio continually moves between the folds of artistic installations, temporary design of public spaces, and experiments on the use of technological visual devices.

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17 See http://micheldesvignepaysagiste.com/en/bordeaux-parc-aux-ang%C3%A9liques-0 (last access: 27. 4. 2020).

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Figure 8: Dakakker rooftop, ZUS, Rotterdam 2015 (Photo: F. Berlingieri).

Instead, the contents of the installations focus on the evidence of climatic effects and the challenges they imply. A recent example is the Waterlicht[18] installation, which has been exhibited in various cities worldwide. It brings the theme of rising sea level and flooding into urban areas, making the water appear as a visual and sound element in temporary open space installations. The virtual reality becomes the key to visually manifest environmental urgencies, and it fosters a new imagery of urban open space and its experience through sensoriality. Another practice that triggers the imagination of new worlds through the intertwining of technologies and design solutions is Philippe Rahm architects. The Jade Eco Park, recently completed in Taichung, is a 70-hectare park in the north district of the city, based and organized on climatic variations. From warmer to colder areas, from wet to dry, from polluted to cleaner, it generates a diversity of microclimates and a multitude of different experiences open to visitors' free will

(Figure 9). The approach relies on the consideration of climate change as an opportunity by rethinking the architecture and the urbanization of the city from an atmospheric point of view, providing new, even sensual, quality of life to its inhabitants (Rahm Architectes, 2017).

Is it possible to test the concept of sensoriality in contemporary urban design practices? Is closeness, as Kengo Kuma's passage from landscape to gardening, a possible conceptual reference through which the incremental presence of Nature in contemporary urban systems can be observed?

The third concept, through which contemporary design practices approach Urban Renaturation, is wilderness.[19] The return to an Arcadian feeling refers to the post-industrialization phase of urban fabrics, where Nature took over what human production had left abandoned in the change of economic systems at the end of the XX century. In this context, "*the distinction between human artifice*

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18 See https://www.studioroosegaarde.net/project/waterlicht (last access: 12. 4. 2020).

19 Regarding the meaning of wilderness as space or region, leftover by man to nature evolution, a main reference is to the position of Gilles Clements. Recent relevant research on wilderness in urban and metropolitan conditions is developed by the geographer and urbanist Matthew Gandy, for example, in the documentary Natura Urbana. The Brachen of Berlin (2015), see also Gandy (2013). About the concept and the interdisciplinary framework regarding urban wilderness, see Kowarik (2018).

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Figure 9: Jade Eco Park, Philippe Rahm, Taichung 2018 (Photo: F. Berlingieri).

and ecological succession becomes progressively blurred" (Gandy, 2006, 70). The category of wilderness, indeed, engages the speculative dimension and the remains of the antithetical relationship between City and Nature, overcome by a series of experimental practices engaging architecture, art, and new technologies (Böhme, 2017). In this semantic reversal, the role of Nature as an integrated component works not just as a moral dictate but as form-generative and sense-production for contemporary urbanscapes. The recent works of Piet Oudolf[20] and Olafur Eliasson[21] can provide some insightful examples. The Dutch garden designer, a leading figure of the New Perennial[22] movement, brought the concepts of spontaneity, structural complexity and seasonal interaction in his landscape projects to international attention, primarily through his work on some of the world's most celebrated contemporary gardens. In particular,

the High Line project in New York and other urban renaturation projects (Figure 10), such as the Boompjeskade in Rotterdam, reintroduce large spaces of naturality in the heart of the city.

An uncontrolled Nature builds unexpected and changing scenarios through the careful selection of perennials plants varieties, where the senses of the users are fully involved, recovering an emotional state of immersion in the natural world. On the other hand, through artistic and sensorial installations, Olafur Eliasson's research focuses on perception and movement of the space that surrounds us, in spatial and environmental terms. Natural phenomena are at the center of his interventions, which are investigated in their scientific aspect and in their influence on human life. The Weather Project in 2003, a site-specific installation on the phenomenon of climate change exhibited at the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern in London, strongly presents a scenario on global warming through the

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20 See https://oudolf.com/ (last access: 30. 7. 2020).

21 See https://www.olafureliasson.net/ (last access: 30. 7. 2020).

22 The New Perennial movement (working with perennial plant variety), or New Wave Planting, refers to landscape design discipline, working on the contemporary reinterpretation of the romantic garden, starting from Chinese and English traditions, in which the complexity and wildness of Nature becomes a specific object for aesthetic investigation, see https://www.landscape.net.au/a-passion-for-perennials/ (last access: 12. 1. 2020).

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use of a semi-circular screen, a ceiling of mirrors, and artificial mist to create the illusion of a massive indoor sunset. The Eliasson's works are political, beyond being aesthetic investigations on climate change perception:

> All human activities have a carbon footprint. Individuals, however, can only do so much. Governments and the international community need to get ambitious about climate action now. But to make this happen, we all need to be active in our own fields and at all possible levels. Now is the time to act on behalf of the planet. (Eliasson, 2020)

Despite their different disciplinary platforms, both works present themselves mainly as intentional poetics to reintroduce Nature back to the city, based on material and phenomenological approach, towards a new idea of seductive wildness. The sensorial experience becomes a key factor in rethinking public open spaces, exceeding ecological urgencies and technicist responses. The question beyond the Green New Deal is reversing the relation between artifice and Nature and refers to a new embedded position, a space of ambivalence (Gandy, 2013).

In brief, the chapter describes the current urban renaturation process through three specific accounts, combining and comparing the most recent subject-related research with current urban design practices. Indeed, the proposed categories of commons, prototypes, and wildernesses highlight different implications. The first explains the new social and ethical value of renaturation actions, not only due to the new forms of active participation but also redefining the leading players in the City-Nature binomial. The second category, *urban prototyping*, highlights the methodological changes taking place in urban design practice, concerning temporary and discrete dimensions of a new "way of doing". Finally, the third category expresses the change of position previously discussed in the theoretical references (see: A theoretical framework). Within the three accounts, the description and analysis of some case studies of contemporary urban design experiences explain the sensorial datum through the concepts of atmosphere, immersive attitude, and new materiality. This character massively and progressively emerges in the last examples, where the architectural project often combines with the aesthetic research through hybrid or artistic forms of expression.

CONCLUSIONS

A lateral perspective on ecology and urban realm

Emissions reduction and spatial footprint, reconversion and recycling, flexibility, and ecological balances have a profound impact on urban environ-

ments. Therefore, architectural and urban design are deeply involved in envisioning new strategies for implementing the quality of the cities we live in. The observed phenomenon according to which contemporary cities are undergoing a resizing of their artificial footprint, with the increase in new natural spaces (ecological corridors, wetlands, forests, large depaved areas), inevitably has had consequences not just on technical responses to the mitigation of climate change effects in urban contexts, but it has mostly been affected by new emerging aesthetics. This phenomenon relates to the image and the meaningful world of the city that we know, where the XX century leading features of order, safety, hygiene, and artificiality are over, since they have been challenged by the advent of something external, uncontrolled, and wild. The proposed comparison between design experiences and current research explores and fosters emergent theories in architectural aesthetics, offering a lateral perspective on the relationship between ecology and the urban realm.

> By moving away from the idea of the city as the antithesis of an imagined bucolic ideal we can begin to explore the production of urban space as a synthesis between nature and culture in which long-standing ideological antinomies lose their analytical utility and political resonance. Thus far, however, the development of more fluid and mutually constitutive conceptions of urban nature have had relatively little impact on popular discourses of "ecological urbanism" where the emphasis has tended towards the functional dynamics of metabolic pathways or the promotion of new forms of bio-diversity as a corollary of social and cultural complexity. It is perhaps only through an ecologically enriched public realm that new kinds of urban environmental discourse may emerge that can begin to leave the conceptual lexicon of the nineteenth--century city behind. (Gandy, 2006, 71)

The contribution presents a preliminary hypothesis of re-conceptualize current practices through a specific filter of an architectural aesthetic approach to the contemporary relation between City and Nature, and to test the paradigmatic shift towards a new ecological sensibility in designing open urban spaces. Despite the importance that the urban and metropolitan dimensions assume in the general layout of the contemporary territorial assets, however, scarce space is offered to critical reflections on the strategies and best practices of the architectural and urban design related to the environmental question. In spite of the punctual design practices observation, it is necessary to develop common and acceptable narratives that

Figure 10: Lurie Garden, Piet Oudolf, Chicago 2019 (Photo: Esther Westerweld, CC, Wikimedia Commons).

could orient open space design towards an integrated approach, taking into account two fundamental elements: ethics and aesthetics.

> From a phenomenological point of view, the aesthetical dimension of an architectural work has to do with the sensible, emotional experience of space, once we consider the space as the element of our dwelling on Earth, that is, according to Heidegger, as the irreducible condition of our ethos. (Younés, 2015, 65)

This paper poses the urgency to escape easy formalistic trends in favor of "eco-friendly spaces", accepting precariousness as a framework for working in times of structural transitions. The attempt is to enlighten the current moral dictate through emerging spatial poetics, envisioning the philosophical question behind. Indeed, although sensoriality and wilderness in public open space design witness the crisis of a modern cultural model based on critical distance, they provide a reversed immersive attitude that could reframe (a new cultural) coherency between time and place.

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PRESEGANJE KONCEPTA *GREEN NEW DEAL*.
NOVE PERSPEKTIVE O SODOBNIH OBLIKOVALSKIH STRATEGIJAH IN PORAJAJOČI
ESTETIKI V ČASU URBANIH TRANZICIJ

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POVZETEK

Nujni ukrepi, ki jih narekujejo učinki podnebnih sprememb, oblikujejo danes skupno podlago za različne obliko-valske prakse, ki skušajo, bodisi na podlagi modelov od spodaj navzgor ali modelov od zgoraj navzdol, odgovoriti na trenutne tranzicije. Večino lahko obravnavamo v okviru urbane renaturacije, krovnega termina, ki je zaradi množice predstavljenih pristopov in argumentov v nevarnosti, da postane splošni vodilni motiv (lajtmotiv), kot zamegljena ali presvetljena slika. Prispevek skuša ponuditi bolj usmerjeno branje, pri čemer področje raziskovanja omejimo z natančno perspektivo: s prepletom arhitekturnih praks in širšega kulturnega vprašanja o odnosu med mestom in naravo. Članek, izhajajoč iz modernizma, obravnava opis sodobne panorame urbanističnega načrtovanja skozi kon-cepte skupnega, prototipov in divjine ter naslavlja prenovljeno spekulativno razsežnost, ki je potrebna za zajezitev splošne ekotehničnosti, ki pravzaprav zakriva in izravnava globlje razloge za raziskave, tudi v arhitekturi.

Ključne besede: urbana renaturacija, tranzicija, arhitekturna estetika, senzoričnost

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