Athens - Ravenna - Cento - Vác
Nürtingen - Villaggio Solidale

2025

Open Landscape Academy

LIVING LABS



OLA

STORIES + RESOURCES FROM THE OLA LIVING LABS

Funded by the European Union

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For more information about the Open Landscape Academy – including resources, events, conferences, and ways to be involved, please visit the OLA website at https://www.openlandscapeacademy.org/

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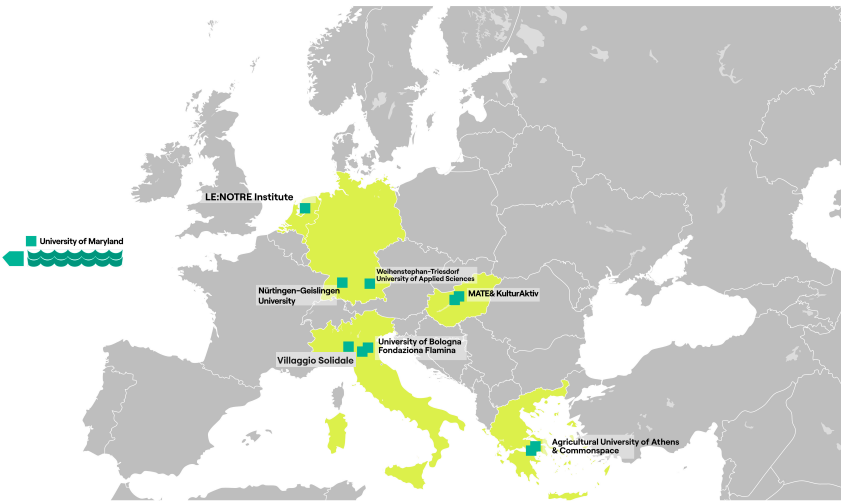
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OLA

Towards an Open Landscape Academy

This booklet presents the results of a three- years project journey towards an Open Landscape Academy. Our journey started ten years ago in 2015 when a group of academics created a transnational classroom on landscape democracy. A second project journey followed during which we explored approaches towards learning, empowerment, agency and partnership in local living labs. This third journey aims at building the conceptual and organisational for an Open Landscape Academy – OLA -, which is to become our long- term validation and sustainability framework for what we have learned, and continue to learn. The institutional home of OLA is the LE:NOTRE Institute.
Our vision is a more just and sustainable world in which how we use and shape our landscapes is driven by the common good and a collaborative process. Our mission is to build capacity for democratic landscape transformation in the global community. OLA is the conceptual and operational platform supporting the implementation of our mission.

What is OLA?

OLA stands for a transnational community of people who work to make landscapes more resilient and inclusive for all. We do this through academic and
non- academic methods. Our work involves education, research, practice, and community participation, all related to landscapes. We see ourselves as agents of democratic change in landscapes.
OLA consists of the following elements, all of which are interoperating in a system driven by people, values and landscapes:

OLA Charta

Our Charta of Democratic Landscape Transformation, presented in full length on the following pages, is a living document that has been cocreated with many people over the past three years. The Charta enunciates the mission, vision, and values of the Open Landscape Academy community of learners and practitioners. It provides a continuous framework of reflection during our learning process.

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OLA Living Labs

The foundation of our knowledge emerges from local living labs, contextualised in unique landscapes across the globe. We understand our living labs as longterm
local community partnerships between education, research, practice and civil society for democratic landscape transformation. Living Labs further involve local authorities, civil servants, local activist groups and NGOs.

OLA Stories

Within this living labs we see stories of democratic landscape transformation continuously emerging and evolving. The stories reveal how values, theories and practices are coming together in specific local landscape contexts. Every story is unique. And every story has something to tell and to transfer to the OLA community. This booklet presents five living labs stories from five different places. OLA invites more stories to be documented, told and shared in the global community so that we can continuously learn and advance theories and methods of democratic landscape transformation through participatory action research.

OLA Methods

There is constant testing, refinement and creation of new methods and approaches within our living lab. We have learned that there is no recipe or 'onesize-
fits- all' for democratic landscape transformation. However, we have tried to distil methodical examples from the living labs and they are presented in this publication and on our website. We invite everyone to use, test, critique and evolve them. And in the future, you may reshare a new approach generated in your living lab with the OLA community.

OLA Learning and Discourse Formats

The global sharing of knowledge happens in various ways. OLA continues the transnational landscape democracy classroom, which was the seed of change back in 2015 that is continuously evolving since. Universities across the globe are
always invited to join. We continue meeting onsite in our living labs in intensive workshop experiences that help facilitators to broaden their skills and methods. This methodical reflection is done each year at the Landscape Forum by the cross- cutting Landscape Democracy working group. In addition, OLA offers an annual online symposium open to academics and professionals, during which we can systematically build a global body of knowledge for democratic landscape transformation. This way, OLA values, theories, methods and discourses are reflected and brought back into the local living labs to advance your stories.

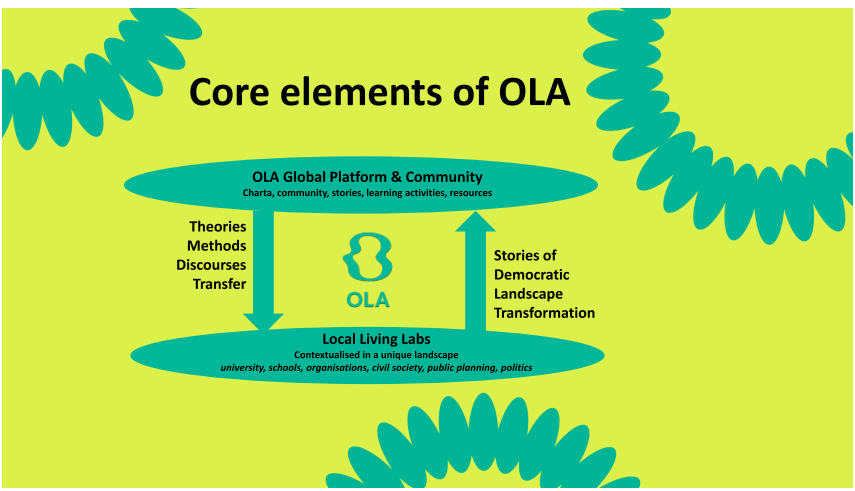
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How you can get involved

OLA partners itself with communities of diverse ages, backgrounds, abilities, and life experiences. We invite you to be a part of our work today, committing at a level that suits your needs and capabilities. Whether you're a student, activist, design practitioner, educator, or just an engaged citizen, you can:

- Join us for our globally-accessible online seminars and take part in assignments like creating landscape democracy challenge maps or landscape democracy manifestoes
- Explore our website to discover stories about democratic landscape transformation in communities around the world.
- Participate in one of our upcoming onsite living labs, intensive design projects or landscape forums
- Share your knowledge and experiences during our annual online symposia

Dr. Ellen Fetzer, OLA project coordinator
on behalf of the transnational OLA ERASMUS team



OLA



...and more in the future

Current OLA Living Labs

Living Labs currently hosted by OLA and noted in this publication.



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The Charta for Democratic Landscape Transformation

This living document enunciates the mission, vision, and values of the Open Landscape Academy community of learners and practitioners.

Version: May 2025

Our **mission** is to build capacity for democratic landscape transformation in the global community.

Our **vision** is a more just and sustainable world in which how we use and shape our landscapes is driven by the common good and a collaborative process.

Definition of the Charta's key terms:

Landscape: The territory we share, shape and steward as a community of humans and non-human beings. In line with the European Landscape Convention, landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas.

Landscape Democracy: The right to landscape of humans and non-human beings, and the responsibility to act towards equality, inclusion, healing, reparation, and justice.

Democratic Landscape Transformation: A process and an approach towards community-based, inclusive and co-creative landscape change for sustainability, equity and regeneration.

Living Labs: Long-term local community partnerships between education, research, practice and civil society for democratic landscape transformation. Living Labs further involve local authorities, civil servants, local activist groups and NGOs.

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View from the Agricultural University of Athens to the Parthenon.
Photo: Angeliki Paraskevopoulou

Athens, Greece
OLA Living Lab



View from the Agricultural University of Athens to the Parthenon. *Photo Source: A. Paraskevopoulou*

What makes an urban landscape democratic? And for whom?

The Athens Living Lab spanning 1.5 km from the Agricultural University Athens explores the raised questions. Rich in history yet environmentally degraded, it contributed to the urban, economic and cultural development of Athens. Workshops uniting locals, businesses, and visitors seek to democratically transform the landscape.

Discover the Athens Living Lab, from the Agricultural University Athens, which, has historically contributed in multiple ways to the urban, economic and cultural development of Athens and with great potential to restore the degraded environment in an effort to democratically transform the landscape of Athens' “backyard”.

Authors: Angeliki Paraskevopoulou, Eleni Mougiakou, Anastasia Christaki

OLA

Athens, Greece
OLA Living Lab

Landscape Context

The Athens Living Lab (Athens LL) is set at a walking distance area, approximately 1.5 km radius surrounding both the campus of the third oldest university in Greece, the Agricultural University of Athens (AUA), and the adjacent Public Damalidokomeio, Public Rabies, and Public Disinfection Centre.

AUA is located in the area of Votanikos of the Municipality of Athens, and in the past constituted part of the ancient olive grove (Elaionas) that used to spread along the Kifisos river, housed the former estate of the voivode of Athens, Hadjis Ali Haseki (1774 - 1795), the former site of the Botanic Garden (founded in 1835) identified by the former Queen Amalia of Greece and is bisected by the Sacred Way which hosted the cult processions of the Eleusinian Mysteries (7th century BC - 392 AD) every year towards the end of September.

The study area, since antiquity, has undergone diverse landscape transformations and constitutes a complex landscape that is environmentally degraded, heedless by layman of the wider area and gradually subjected to gentrification.

Today, the study area generally consists of anarchic construction, many abandoned industrial buildings, some active polluting businesses, empty or unused land and relatively few residents.

This Athens LL despite being referred to as the "backyard" of the city, is a neighborhood, which, has historically contributed in multiple ways to the urban, economic and cultural development of Athens and with great potential to restore the degraded environment and to democratically transform the landscape.

Therefore, the research question of the Athens LL is: What makes an urban landscape democratic? And for whom? Both the Agricultural University of Athens, and commonspace coop, coordinate and organise workshops addressing, local residents, businesses, and visitors, to assess the landscape character and propose design strategies to enhance the local history and values and democratically transform the studied landscape.

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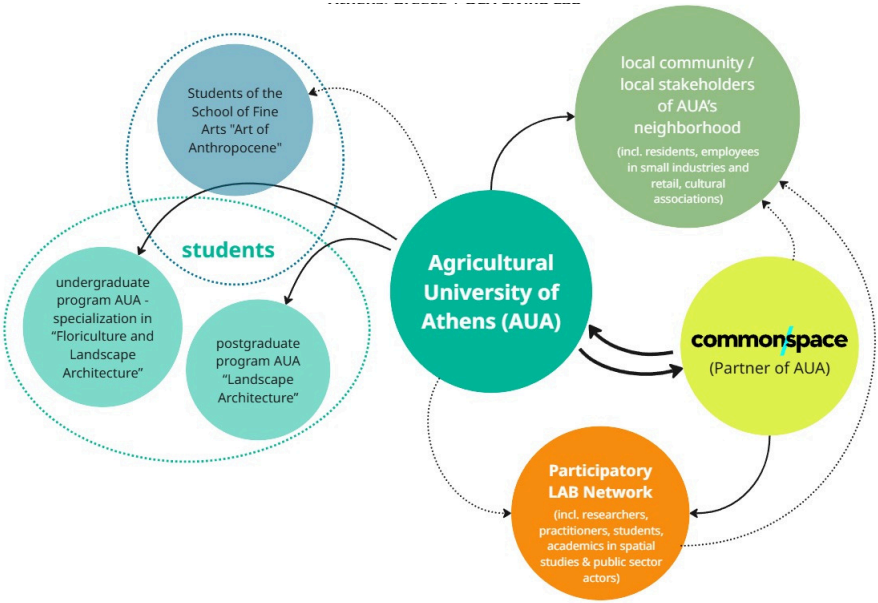

There are productive areas in the campus, for research and education
Photo Sources: Ellen Fetzer, Caroline de Vries

Community Map

The Agricultural University of Athens (AUA) campus is 25 ha, located at the centre of the Athens LL studied area which constitutes AUA's neighbourhood. AUA is an autonomous state university comprised of 6 schools and 14 departments offering undergraduate and postgraduate Education and Research in Agricultural Science as well as a wide variety of projects and actions to the public including student internship.

Commonspace (Partner of AUA), is a collaborative-interdisciplinary planning and design group creating a network of experts and scientists involved in Urban and Spatial planning and Environmental Management, and the development of methodologies and tools for Participatory Planning of Public Spaces.

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Community Map of the area of Votanikos
Source: A. Paraskevopoulou

The land uses of the Athens LL area comprise of low and medium nuisance industrial and light-industrial parks, residential areas, enterprises, businesses, food services, public services, educational institutions, military facilities, places of worship, logistics, cultural associations, museums, workshops, limited green spaces, covered and open water courses (branches of Kifissos river) and abandoned lands and buildings.

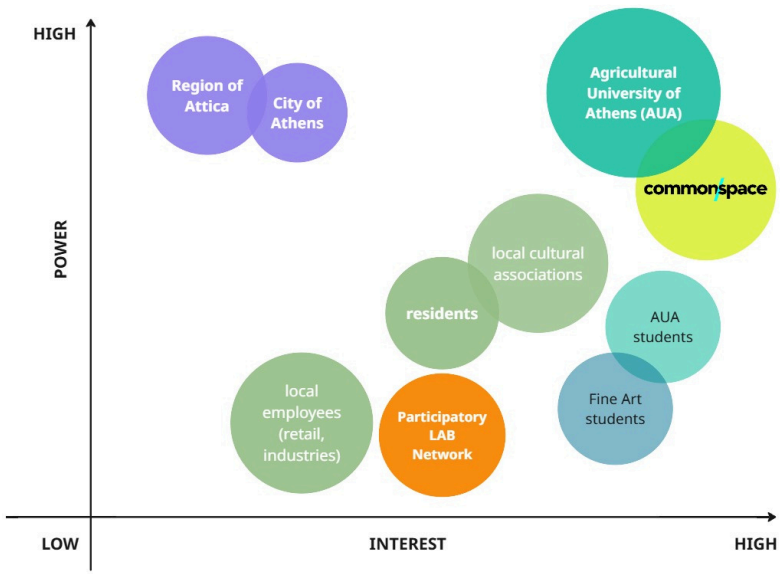
The community of the Athens LL area includes employers, employees, civil servants, residents, students, and visitors of all ages, ethnicity, income, and religion. Since January 2023 the content and objectives of OLA have been communicated primarily to the students of the postgraduate study program "Landscape Architecture" and secondarily to the undergraduate students specialized in "Floriculture and Landscape Architecture" to acquire knowledge, skills and competences on the process for democratic landscape transformation.

Students of the School of Fine Arts undertaking the "Art of Anthropocene" supervised by Katerina Athanasiou Special Education Staff collaborated with AUA's "landscape students" to develop art inspired by the Athens LL, based on the theme "Democratic encounters of landscape architecture and fine art in the Anthropocene".

The Athens Living Lab (LL) is also linked to commonspace's initiative, Participatory LAB, an active and interdisciplinary community dedicated to studying, documenting, promoting, and implementing participatory planning processes within the context of Climate Change Adaptation. Participatory LAB serves as a network to connect diverse stakeholders, including researchers, practitioners, students, academics in spatial studies, as well as public and private sector actors, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Through this initiative, the Athens LL has been disseminated to these audiences, aiming to integrate it into broader networks of Labs and communities.

Power Map



Power Map of the area
Source: A. Paraskevopoulou

OLA

Visiting the Athens LL area, it becomes apparent that conflicts exist amongst the different groups. Small industries, and logistics, co-exist with residents and retail in a competitive manner, e.g. sharing roads with no sidewalks, and being exposed daily to traffic, noise, and air pollution.

Both the City of Athens and Region of Attica have a decisive role in the planning and management of the Athens LL area; e.g. the dual regeneration of the City of Athens entails the development of a modern stadium (max. capacity 40,000), located adjacent to AUA.

Gentrification has encroached (small properties being replaced by apartment buildings) and is expected to intensify with the development of the stadium. The AUA campus is amongst the largest properties, occupying approximately 3.5% of the surface area of the Athens LL, constituting at large a green space within the area due to its cultivations.

AUA's academic community comprises of 5,243 undergraduate-, 656 postgraduate-, and 445 PhD- students and 450 teaching and research staff; hence AUA is an integral member of the Athens LL community. The Athens LL has been the subject of research for AUA's students recording, witnessing and proposing landscape changes. AUA's School of Plant Sciences, project "Urban Heat Watch Observatory on Urban Green and Climate Resilience", funded by the "Green Fund" studied the effect of extreme heat in AUA's campus and surrounding area.

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Values

The core values (openness, inclusiveness, participation, empathy, sustainability, resilience) of the Charta for Democratic Landscape Transformation are realized through tools such as collective creativity and visioning, storytelling, and regenerative design.

The Athens LL embraces these values in its workshops and makes efforts to apply the values and raise awareness.
With the partial exception of recycling, overall, the values related to sustainability and resilience are not represented in the Athens LL, characterised by limited green spaces, covered up ravines, and in places, abandoned buildings, traffic, noise and pollution. Despite the latter the green spaces and street cleaning are well-maintained by the local authority. People of different minorities during the early hours of the morning are often seen recycling paper, metal, etc.; however, some of the recycling practices are unsustainable such as the burning of electrical wires to remove the wire insulation that seems to have declined as legitimate metal recycling centres won't accept burned wires without certification that it derived from a residential/commercial fire. On Sundays, near Elaionas metro station, members of an association of scavengers set up a Scavenger Bazaar in a vacant plot of land of the City of Athens selling collectables (crockery, toys, old books, magazines, cameras, musical instruments, clothing, etc.), which otherwise would be disposed in landfills, facilitating in preserving the association's culture. The people found passing by in the Athens LL are of all ages, ethnicity, income, and religion however the landscape in many locations does not support inclusiveness and empathy by inhibiting the safe mobility of people and restricting access.

On the other hand, several associations have been identified within the Athens LL area reflecting common values amongst its members and in one case organises an annual summer street party with free entrance, promoting openness and inclusiveness.

Research Questions

Since antiquity, the area has undergone diverse landscape transformations and the Athens LL constitutes a complex landscape that is environmentally degraded, consists of anarchic construction, abandoned industrial buildings, some active polluting businesses, empty or unused land and residential areas and is in need to synthesize its mosaic.

It supports an important transportation network, served by Metro line 3, while several businesses are housed along Athens Avenue, including the Athens Stock Exchange. Several old industrial buildings and warehouses were converted into nightclubs with live music, making the area a nightlife area. Several theaters were developed in the area, as well as the Greek Film Archive (1963).

It seems that various aspects of the present landscape are "forgotten" for many. This is a neighborhood, which, although it may have been characterized as the "backyard" of the capital, has historically contributed in multiple ways to the urban, economic and cultural development of Athens.

Considering all above, the research question of the Athens LL is: What makes an urban landscape democratic? And for whom?

Process Diary

Dr Angeliki Paraskevopoulou and project partner Eleni Mougiakou led the Blended Intensive Program and all workshops (except one) with student participants primarily from AUA's MA of Landscape Architecture. The workshop entitled "Democratic encounters of landscape architecture and fine art in the Anthropocene" was led by Dr Angeliki Paraskevopoulou and Katerina Athanasiou Special Education Staff from the School of Fine Arts, with student participants from both universities. Some students also participated in the online seminars of OLA.

2023 Athens LL/ The concept of developing Urban Resilience in relation to Democratic Landscape Transformation

The AUA postgraduate students studying Landscape Architecture are taught "Cultural and Social Aspects of Landscape Architecture" that aims to equip students with all the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to successfully meet the requirements they will face in the study and integration of social and cultural elements in the landscape architecture design process.

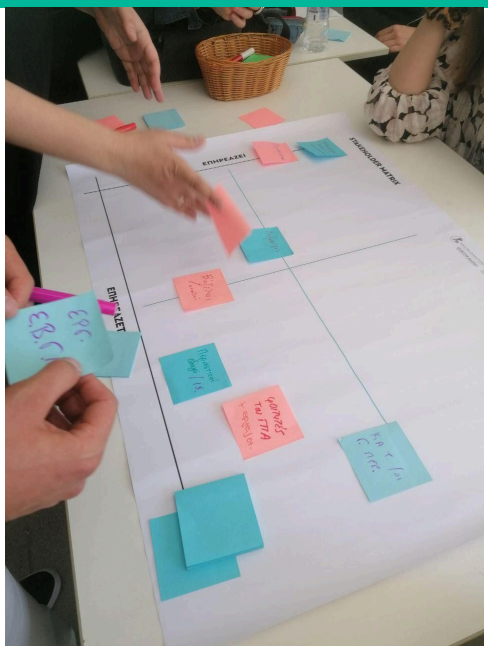


Figure 1: Seminar on participatory design and democratic landscape transformation delivered by project partner commonspace.

During their modules the students attended three seminars on participatory design and democratic landscape transformation delivered by project partner commonspace (Figure 1). The AUA postgraduate students studying Landscape Architecture are taught theories, discussions and critical thinking on modern trends to landscape planning, design, and management, sustainability and resilience in relation to democratic landscape transformation were implemented. The area surrounding AUA is faced with many challenges in order to become sustainable and resilient and constitutes "AUA's neighborhood" though ease of access to the area provides opportunities for metropolitan interest.

The academic community traverse their "neighborhood" on weekdays and often on weekends, and it offers a learning environment for AUA students particularly the postgraduate students studying Landscape Architecture and for other domestic and international students.

A walking distance (1,5 km radius) around the AUA campus and adjacent building complex of the Public Damalidokomeio, Public Rabies, and Public Disinfection Centre, determined the study area of the Athens LL.

Considering the context of the course presented throughout the semester, students were assigned to deliver an essay on developing Urban Resilience addressing particular groups for democratic landscape transformation from a given list stating the group's needs, making proposals and introducing specifications to meet them (Table 1).

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Identifying Local Groups

Table 1: Student main outcomes (needs, proposals and specifications) of particular groups for developing Urban Resilience in democratic landscape transformation.

group	needs	proposals	specifications
senior citizens and green spaces	enhance visitation of senior citizen to green spaces	facilitate access to green spaces	provide sense of safety, ongoing maintenance of pedestrian routes, introduce ramps, road crossings, and adequate time at traffic lights to cross roads
teenagers and green spaces	enhance teenager green space contact	introduce planting in school grounds, facilitate access to parks, design green spaces for teenagers	provide sense of safety, different levels of physical activities, opportunities for social interaction
urban horticulture in public spaces	access to fresh food, social and educational opportunities, develop green space, support human well-being	practice urban arboriculture, utilize green technologies (green roofs, balconies, green walls), develop public urban allotments, enhance urban agriculture, develop school gardens	introduce signage and labels, provide seating, recycle waste, minimize the use of water resources, consider lighting, irrigation and drainage requirements
people and cycle paths	enhance cycling	design, develop and manage safe, unified, attractive routes for cycling	connect different cycle paths directly, provide bicycle parking, provide ongoing maintenance, provide rental bicycles, increase width of cycle paths, develop cycle paths in areas with no metro stations, provide public transport for cyclists in areas with difficult access for cyclists (e.g. steep gradients)
children aged 0-5 years and playgrounds	spend time outdoors, explore “large” spaces under parental supervision, experiment in an environment with some managed risk	design spaces with various activities that stimulate children, integrate planting to create a “garden” within the playground	provide various types of surfaces (safety, hard- and soft- surfaces), follow safety regulations, cater for both gender, children with special needs, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), provide ecosystem services through planting

group	needs	proposals	specifications
children aged 6-13 years and playgrounds	provide play opportunities for all children and reduce exposure to heat, noise and pollution	design inclusive playgrounds and integrate green infrastructure within playgrounds	design follows safety regulations, provide 4 main uses (play, movement, rest, planting), safety surfaces, ongoing maintenance, fencing, disabled access, accommodate children with various physical, mental and learning abilities, select appropriate plants
people with disabilities and green spaces	facilitate people with mobility disabilities	develop access for all	introduce signage and labels, develop detectable and safe paths (1.5 m width without obstructions, raised warning stripes), ramps with small gradients, road crossings, public transport, car parks for disabled people, continuous maintenance
people and outdoor gyms	enhance outdoor physical activity	develop outdoor gyms that cater for different age groups	provide variety of physical activities, connect with other infrastructures such as paths for walking
people and historic green spaces	preserve and protect historical and culture value, support access,	develop maintenance and management plan, restore (if applicable), integrate opportunities for education, increase access (tourism), inform and communicate ownership of space and managing authority	introduce rules to protect against wear and tear, determine and communicate compliant uses, provide information and signage, introduce facilities (e.g. café, gift shops), make mobility accessible and accessible
spatial analysis as a planning tool	spatial-temporal analysis of resilience	study the spatial-temporal inter- relations of different landscape characters	determine spatial analysis (morphology, scale and time) identify the effects and inter-relations of different elements that compose the landscape
pupils and primary school grounds	increase pupil-plant contact, use plants to support educational outdoor activities and experiences through play and teaching, decrease exposure to adverse weather conditions (e.g. heat)	introduce green spaces and bioclimatic design, create school garden, utilise green technologies	follow safety regulations (e.g. two entrances, access, to building, etc.), provide 5 main spaces (congregation, relaxation, play, green space, hosting events)
people with mental illnesses and green spaces	develop healing gardens	introduce horticultural therapy, and outdoor physiotherapy and therapy activities	provide sense of safety, opportunities for social interactions, easy access, use appropriate plants (non- poisonous or prickly), encourage contact with plants and or gardening activities

2024 Athens LL/ Site analysis led research question

In 2024, the 2nd year MA Landscape Architecture students were assigned in small groups (4-5 students each of different disciplines) to undertake a site analysis that involved on-site visits to the Athens LL area, to record and collect field data, analyse the data and present the fieldwork results primarily using digital means (secondarily with models or charts, etc.).

Adjacent to the AUA campus on Iera Odos (The Scared Way) is located the Public Damalidokomeio, Public Rabies, and Public Disinfection Centre constituting a building complex, comprised of 17 buildings the majority of which are abandoned today. Over the years the press has published articles on the Region of Attica granting the building complex to the Agricultural University, that has met the opposition of the "Association of Employees of the Region of Attica" proposing to use its buildings, for cultural activities and events of organizations, and for a museum to highlight the history and exhibit the equipment of the centre. After initial communication with the staff of the Public Disinfection Centre a site visit to the building complex took place.

A historical review of the Athens LL studied area determined locations of historical significance such as archaeological sites, the establishment of important to the local economy industries that continue to function today or have declined, and the establishment of local societies. The locations of the main uses, including residential areas, were determined. Over 100 societies, associations, NGO's, cultural, educational, and religious bodies were identified (the list is not exhaustive).

The students presented their results in class and were further assigned to propose a strategic masterplan for the adjacent building complex that would function as a hub for the Athens LL and thematic routes (culture, education, sports, industrial, worship, recreation) based on their findings (Figure 2).

The key output of the workshop determined the research question: What makes an urban landscape democratic? And for whom?

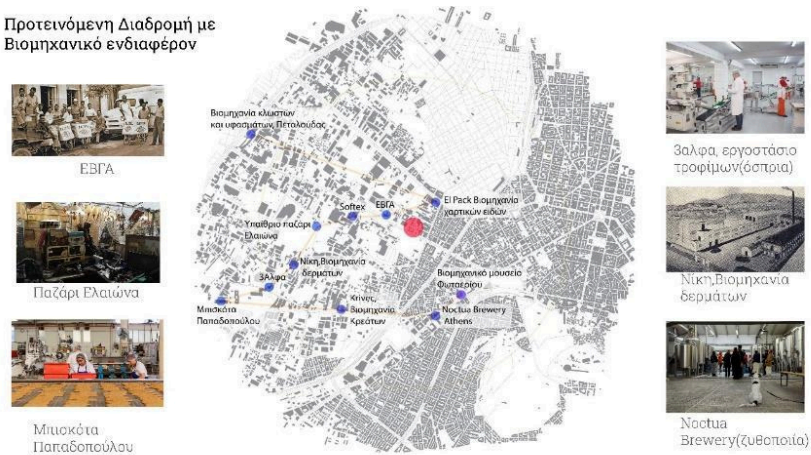


Figure 2: Indicative map depicting key industries including former industries and proposed industrial routes for the selected study area (Athens LL) (list is not exhausted).
Output generated by 2nd year MLA students of the Agricultural University of Athens, Greece: Konstantinos Nikolaos Gkekas, Aliki Dourountaki, Marinos Kokkinos, Dimitra Mamalou, Eleni Papavasileiou. Tutor: Angeliki Paraskevopoulou

2024 Athens LL/ Participatory citizen science campaign of 'Urban Heat Watch'

A participatory citizen science campaign on the initial results of the research project entitled "Urban Heat Watch Observatory on Urban Green and Climate Resilience" and funded by the "Green Fund" took place, studying the effect of extreme heat in AUA's campus using mini-weather stations (MeteoTracker/ IoToppon srl, Italy) and a drone equipped with a thermal camera that gathered data during the 2023 heatwave.



Figure 3: Participatory citizen science campaign on the initial results of the research project entitled "Urban Heat Watch Observatory on Urban Green and Climate Resilience", funded by the "Green Fund".

The campaign took place at the outdoor canteen of the AUA campus during lunch time and invited AUA staff, students and visitors to participate in a questionnaire survey and comment on the initial results of the project's findings (Figure 3). The event was advertised online as well with posters throughout the campus. Students attending the blended Intensive Program – Athens LL were informed about the research project and the role of participatory citizen science for collecting data and actively getting involved in decision making processes and had the opportunity to visit and participate in the campaign.

2024 Athens LL/ Blended Intensive Program

The Blended Intensive Program was built upon the outputs of the previously implemented workshops. It took place in a large spacious room at the Agricultural University of Athens that contained chairs and large tables that could be assembled in different ways to accommodate the workshop needs.

On May 25, 2024, the Intensive course began with an icebreaker where students and accompanying professors/scientific collaborators from all partners (Weihenstephan – Triesdorf University of Applied Sciences, Freising, Germany, Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Umwelt, Nüertingen, Germany, ALMA MATER STUDIORUM - Università di Bologna, Bologna, Italy, Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences of Gödöllő Hungary, and University of Maryland, College Park USA and LE:NOTRE INSTITUTE, Netherlands, kultúrAktív Egyesület, Hungary and Fondazione Flaminia, Italy including the Agricultural University of Athens and Commonspace) introduced themselves that proved very effective for bonding with each other as they were introduced into their groups and assignments over the following days. One key theme was assigned to each of the four groups: "Social Economy", "Narratives & Daily Life", "Cultural Heritage" and "Biodiversity & Environment". In order for all groups to familiarise themselves with all topics during site visits members of the theme groups were divided further into other "site visiting groups" that were formed by mixing people from all groups; this allowed after each site visit the members of each theme group to regather and share their inputs from the site visits with their fellow theme members. The study area of the intensive course was in Eleonas / Votanikos, Athens, Greece, and in particular the area surrounding AUA located adjacent to the former Damalidokomeio (Public Rabies and Public Disinfection Centre) at a radius of approximately 1.5 km (within walking distance). The end of the day was reached with a tour of the campus of the Agricultural University of Athens that also constituted part of the study area.

On May 26, 2024, participants began to explore the study area by visiting and interacting with people at the scavenger bazaar as well as the employee of the Public Disinfection Centre (former Damalidokomeio). Reflections in each of the theme groups in relation to their assigned topic followed the above visits.

On May 27, 2024, presentations took place about the study area Elaionas / Votanikos, followed by walks in the area to explore the area further as well as to engage with people in the neighborhoods and streets to collect their opinions about the area. After the visits theme groups reflected on their findings in relation to their assigned topic. The end of the day was reached by a site visit to the Parthenon at the Acropolis (symbol and birthplace of Democracy) within walking distance from AUA or short public transportation on the metro (3 stops).

On May 28, 2024, participants met at Plato's olive (an entrance point into Plato's Academy during Antiquity) that constituted the starting point for the three different routes visited by each of the "site visiting groups". The theme routes were: Route 1 (Industrial, Logistics, Enterprises, Economy): Markoni residential neighborhood/ Hellenic stock exchange, Route 2 (Environment & Biodiversity): Elaionas industrial zone/ waterstream and Route 3 (Residential, Historical, Cultural / Industrial Heritage): Kerameikos area / cultural and industrial zone. At each route there was a scheduled meeting with local stakeholders. Following the route visits each theme group reflected on the inputs of their visits and began to vision on their output based on all the collected data thus far. On completion of the day's work, an optional food tour of the Elaionas area took place that was an output developed by the 2nd year postgraduate MLA students of the AUA as part of the Athens LL (acad. yr 2023-2024).

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On May 29, 2024 participants continued working in their theme groups and also visited an open-air participatory workshop at AUA of the programme entitled "Urban Heat Watch" Observatory on Urban Green and Climate Resilience" funded by the "Green Fund" where they had the opportunity to be informed and make questions on the initial results of the project's findings concerning the effect of extreme heat in urban areas as well as greenery/ green spaces. Urban heat in Mediterranean cities such as Athens and particularly in densely built / industrial areas such as Elaionas constitutes a key problem that needs to be addressed. Back at the Hall, a presentation on prototyping took place and the theme groups began to work on the prototypes of their outputs.

On May 30, 2024 a presentation on "story maps" took place to facilitate participants in developing their outputs. The remainder of the day was dedicated to group work in each of the theme groups.

On May 31, 2024 each theme group continued their group work, rehearsed and finalised their output/s. In the afternoon the Multiplier event of OLA (part 2/2) took place at the Multiple Purpose Hall, 2nd Floor of the Central Administration building of AUA during which the outputs of each theme group as well as the artwork of the sculpture workshop (part of Athens LL) entitled "Democratic encounters of landscape architecture and fine art in the Anthropocene " were presented to an open audience. The Athens OLA intensive course ended with a tour of the artwork developed on the AUA campus and a group photo of the participants.

Figure 4: Members of different theme groups working collectively on their assigned topic.



2024 Athens LL/ Sculpture workshop entitled "Democratic encounters of landscape architecture and fine art in the Anthropocene"

During spring 2024, as part of the Athens LL a sculpture workshop entitled "Democratic encounters of landscape architecture and fine art in the Anthropocene" took place, and the works exhibited in selected areas on the campus of the AUA, during May 2024.

The workshop involved the development of artwork by 4 students from the School of Fine Arts, undertaking the "Art of Anthropocene" supervised by Katerina Athanasiou Special Education Staff. The art students collaborated and interacted with volunteer students from the postgraduate programme "Landscape Architecture" and the specialisation "Floriculture and Landscape Architecture" of the undergraduate programme of the Agricultural University of Athens.

The aim of the particular Athens LL was to research how artists and landscape architects influence each other in developing artwork for Democratic Landscape Transformation. The main historical and cultural events of the Athens LL area was communicated to the art students prior to their encounter with the landscape students to familiarise themselves with the studied area. Visits to AUA campus and the surrounding area followed to provide general information to the art students on the processes of landscape design and democratic landscape transformation, emphasing the role of artwork as an element in landscape design. Informal discussions and meetings took place amongst the art and landscape students prior to developing the concepts for their artwork.

The art students communicated their concepts and permission from the pertinent university authorities were obtained to realise the artwork. The materials used for two artworks were collected mainly from the AUA campus that included wood, straw and soil, while ethe other two artworks were digital. The produced artworks of the workshop were presented at the Athens Multiplier event of the Intensive Blended Program on May 31, 2024 (see above) (Figure 5).

2025 Athens LL/ Questionnaire Survey

Following the definition of the research question, in 2025, the 2nd year MA Landscape Architecture students were assigned to undertake a questionnaire survey to study participants perceptions and knowledge and/access to particular locations of the Athens LL area as well as proposals for democratic landscape transformation of the Athens LL.

Following the students will be assigned to make strategic design proposals based on the results of the questionnaire survey. Currently the questionnaire survey is underway.

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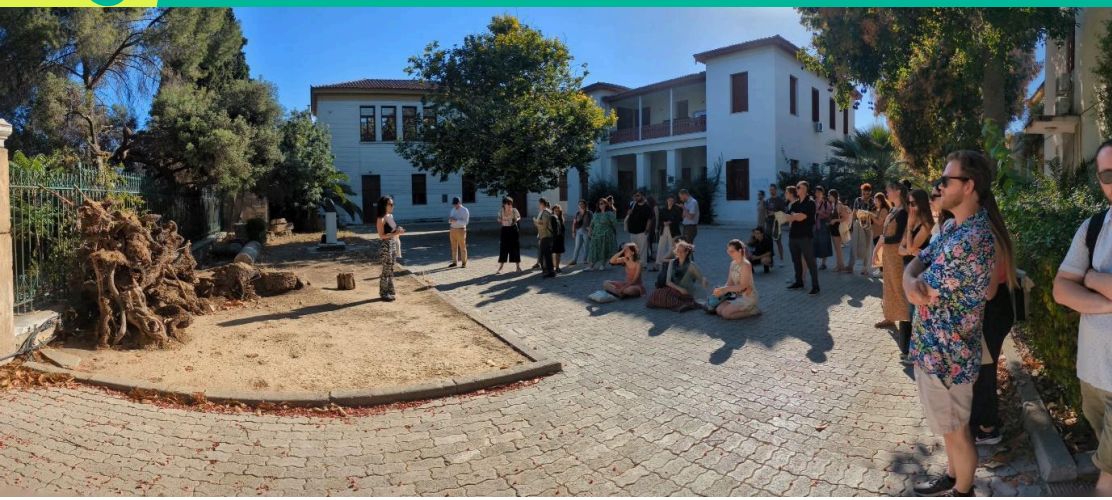


Figure 5: Presentation of artwork at the Athens Multiplier event of the Intensive Blended Program at the Agricultural University of Athens, Greece (May 31, 2024).

Impact of the Living Lab

Overall students responded well to all the assignments (activities). Students freely exchanged in class ideas and perceptions on the course's content utilising the skills, knowledge and competences of their backgrounds enriching further their learning. The fieldwork contributed further to the experiential learning process as students were able to learn and experience various methodologies, they could utilize for developing democratically sustainable and resilient landscapes. The outputs were marked that formed the grade of the course. The impact was mainly educational however the students after graduating are expected as landscape architects to be future ambassadors for democratic landscape transformation. The interaction of students with the volunteer participants of the Athens LL (e.g. questionnaire survey) raises awareness of the student's work as well as the concept of democratic landscape transformation.

Reflection: Failures and Success Factors

It is difficult to engage students to participate in workshops out of hours as their schedule varies. The Athens LL was successful because it was integrated into a related course of the postgraduate program study "Landscape Architecture" and followed the course outline. This requires careful preparation of the course outline so students felt confident in what they were assigned to do. Efforts to engage the public in the workshops is very difficult as most of them work or in a hurry and are unable to dedicate their time to participate.

Transferable Approaches from this Living Lab

The methodologies applied in the current workshops can and should be modified if applied in other case studies as all landscapes are site specific thus unique in their own way. Future efforts include to engage the public using "attractive tools" yet to be investigated and determined and could be the objective of future workshops. Additional methods of qualitative research are also considered in future workshops.

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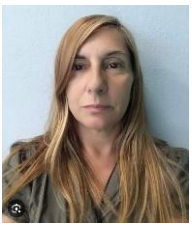
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Aikaterini Gkoltsiou
Dr Aikaterini Gkoltsiou is assistant professor at the Laboratory of Floriculture and Landscape Architecture, Department of Crop Science, at the Agricultural University of Athens (AUA). She is the President of the European Region of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA Europe) (2021-2025) and the Vice President of IFLA.

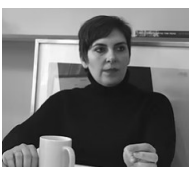
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Katerina Athanasiou
Katerina Athanasiou studied Sculpture at the Athens School of Fine Arts (ASFA) and completed a postgraduate program in Digital Art Forms. She is a faculty member at ASFA, has taught at universities, held solo exhibitions, and participated in research and artistic projects.

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Eleni Mougiakou is an Agricultural Engineer with a Bachelor-MSc from the Agricultural University of Athens, with a Landscape Architecture specialization. She completed her Master's Degree in Geoinformatics with distinction from the National Technical University of Athens, Department of Geography and Regional Planning. She has been working in the area of Urban Green-Space Planning and GIS for many years. She is PhD candidate at AUA and co-founder of commonspace coop.

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Anastasia Christaki is a graduate of the School of Architectural Engineering at the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA, 2018) and currently a PhD candidate at NTUA. She has contributed to conferences and scientific publications both in Greece and internationally. She is a member of commonspace Co-op, where she specializes in participatory urban design programs and research projects focused on cultural heritage and its dynamic relationship with public space, the urban environment, and citizen participation.

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Living Lab Participants

2023 Athens LL/ The concept of developing Urban Resilience in relation to Democratic Landscape Transformation

Invited speakers: Eleni Mougiakou
Tutors: Angeliki Paraskevopoulou, Aikaterini Gkoltsiou
MLA postgraduate students: Maria Ilianna Vamvakouri, Giako Tzemes, Martha Aggeliki Karababa, Antonis Karabourniotis, Eleni Karystinou, Georgia Kokkinou, Ioanna Kougia, Chrysoula Aggeliki Krita, Georgios Michaelidis, Erai Mollal-Halil, Ifigeneia Papadonatou, Olympia Tsixlaki

2024 Athens LL/ Collective landscape socio-spatial exploration

Tutor: Angeliki Paraskevopoulou
MLA postgraduate students: Eutuxia Alevizaki, Konstantinos Nikolaos Gkekas, Christina Goutzani, Aliki Dourountaki, Paraskevi Ziazia, Alexandros-Epameinondas Kitriniaris, Marinos Kokkinos, Dimitra Mamalou, Konstantina-Panayiota Panagaki, Vasiliki Panagopoulou, Eleni Papavasileiou, Foteini Papageorgiou, Maria Myrto Catzikyrou

2024 Athens LL/ Blended Intensive Program

Tutors:

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Commonspace, Greece: Eleni Mougiakou, Anastasia Christaki, Yannis Paraskevopoulos, Sofia Tsadari, Artemis Koumparelou, Melina Vlachou
Weihenstephan-Triesdorf University of Applied Sciences and Nürtingen-Geislingen University, Germany: Ellen Fetzer, Sonja Hörster, Dirk Funck, Caroline de Vries
Bologna University, Italy: Michael Venturelli
Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, MATE Hungary: Istvan Valánszki, Tayana Passos Rosa
University of Maryland, USA: Patrick Boyle, Deni Ruggeri (online)
LE:NOTRE Institute, the Netherlands: Jeroen de Vries
KultúrAktív, Hungary: Eszter Tóth, Anna Szilágyi-Nagy
Fondazione Flaminia, Italy: Luigi Bartolomei

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Students:

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Weihenstephan-Triesdorf University of Applied Sciences, Germany: Marie-Luise Schega, Pia Scharnagl, Elio Demel, Maja Schittig, Nina Ried, Janine Langenberger, Marwin Wolz, Philipp Gülzow, Nina Wiedemann, Lucie Geoffroy
Bologna University, Italy: Arianna Ghinelli, Marica Ruggiero, Sarah Mohamed, Seyed Mohammad amin Farzinfar, Atefeh Kheradmand
Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, MATE Hungary: Anna Borkó, Ansam Bzour, Rahaf Yousef, Sára Szekér, Renáta Gergály
University of Maryland, USA: Laura Crocker, Kelly Rasmussen Erasmus Internship: Aniela Lipinska

2024 Athens LL/ Sculpture workshop entitled "Democratic encounters of landscape architecture and fine art in the Anthropocene"

Tutors: Angeliki Paraskevopoulou, Katerina Athanasiou
School of Fine Art: Nafsika Tzanoulidou, Efthimis Gronthos, Elpida Chatzinikolaou, Harris Kladis
Agricultural University of Athens: Aikaterini Tsoni, Erai Molla Halil, Eutuxia Alevizaki, Marinos Kokkinos, Konstantina Panayiota Panagaki,
Erasmus Internship: Aniela Lipińska

2025 Athens LL/ Questionnaire Survey

Tutor: Angeliki Paraskevopoulou
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Athens Living Lab Participants at the Agricultural University of Athens, Greece *May 2024*

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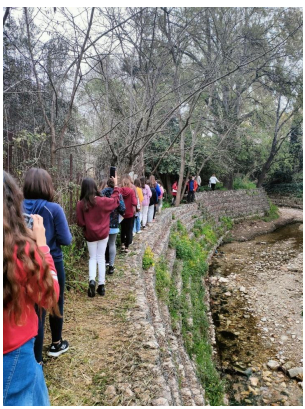
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Methods from the Living Lab

Transferable tools used in the Athens Living Lab to inspire your local lab

Landscape Flâneurs

Experimental fieldwork for landscape observation



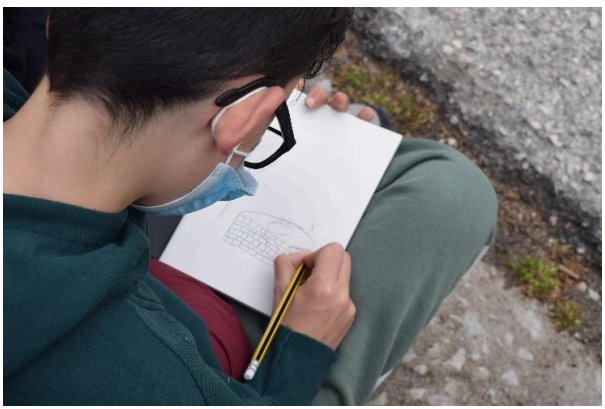


Figure 1: Participatory program "Water Flaneurs", in the context of Cultural Hidrant project. Created by commonspace.

What is this, and what is it used for?

Landscape Flâneurs is a method of experiential fieldwork that encourages landscape observation, sensory mapping, spatial empathy, and a sense of public space ownership while fostering an understanding of diverse landscape narratives. The concept of flâneurs, which involves walking spontaneously without a specific purpose through the landscape and sketching, helps to stimulate and sharpen the senses. This method can be applied to any fieldwork or qualitative data collection process by following a series of steps that include strolling, observing, sketching, and collective envisioning.

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How is it done?

1. Discuss the concept of “flâneur”: Begin by collectively exploring the meaning of "flâneur" with the participants to establish a shared understanding.
2. Define the purpose of the flâneur walk: Explore the thematic focus and the final goal of the walk. For example, is the objective to collectively map a sense of a neighborhood or to create a comic synthesis?
3. Provide materials and break the ice: Hand out sketchbooks and pencils to participants. Facilitate an icebreaker activity to help them feel comfortable and open to the experience.
4. Explore the landscape: Plan the walk in a way that provide the “flâneurs” time to relax, observe, experience, and sketch the landscape.
5. Reflect and share: Return to the team and engage in collective visioning. Discuss the various narratives of each flâneur—what they sketched and why.
6. Map the insights: Organize and map the sketches and observations to identify patterns and connections.
7. Create the collective outcome: Collaboratively produce the final output, such as a booklet, comic, or mental map, that synthesizes the group’s experience and observations.

Materials

- Sketchbooks
- Pencils
- Any other stationery that is needed in the group
- Maps and plans for the final collective vision session

Prerequisites

No prerequisites needed.

Time required

The time frame can be adjusted to suit the needs of the project. A suggested agenda:

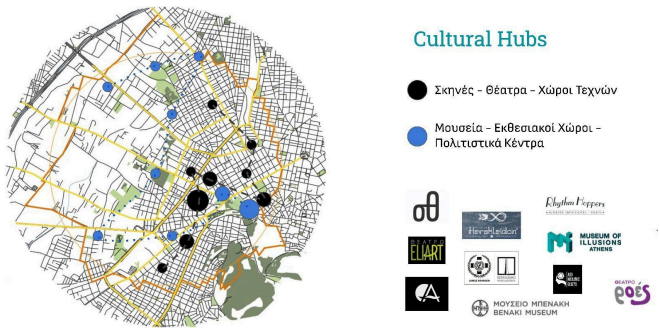
- Preliminary Discussion: One session of 1–2 hours to discuss objectives and plans before the walk.
- Walking Activity: 1–2 hours of walking, including breaks for sketching and resting.
- Workshop Session: 1–2 hours for a collective workshop focused on visioning and mapping observations

Number of people

There are no strict restrictions on the number of participants, but the ideal group size is from 5 to 20 people. The method can be implemented within a group walking together, where individuals either create their own sketches or work in smaller groups to sketch collaboratively. In either case, the process concludes with a collective session focused on visioning and mapping.

Collective Landscape Socio-Spatial Exploration

Analysis for delivery of participatory workshops



Indicative map depicting the key cultural elements and proposed potential cultural routes for the selected for study area (Athens LL) (list is not exhausted). Output generated by 2nd year MLA students of the Agricultural University of Athens, Greece: Konstantinos Nikolaos Gkekas, Aliki Dourountaki, Marinos Kokkinos, Dimitra Mamalou, Eleni Papavasileiou. Tutor: Angeliki Paraskevopoulou

What is this, and what is it used for?

It's a combination of desk- and field- work aiming to explore the landscape socio-spatial connection of a neighbourhood. It is based on traditional approaches to landscape design such as site analysis that involves on-site visits and the collection of information including spatial information from various archives, further enriched with spatial information provided from various web mapping platforms. It facilitates to have a basic understanding of the landscape socio-spatial connection that would facilitate the organisation and successful delivery of participatory workshops.

Authors

Angeliki Paraskevopoulou

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How is it done?

1. Define the study area: generate a map of the studied area uploaded onto a tablet or in hardcopy form to take notes.
2. Project brief: brief project aims and objectives to small groups (3-5 people) with basic training in landscape architecture and/or environmental science and assign each group particular area of study and work.
3. Obtain spatial information: visit local or national archives, services, or authorities to obtain spatial information of the studied site (i.e. demographic, hydrological, geological, etc.).
4. Undertake a site analysis: visit the studied site and record the physical, environmental and cultural elements of the landscape accompanied by pictures.
5. Explore web mapping platforms: research online to obtain spatial information of the studied area from various web mapping platforms (i.e. Google Maps, OpenStreet Map).
6. Map data: Altogether, generate a map of the collected data to illustrate the spatial distribution/connection of the key physical, environmental, cultural and social elements.
7. Undertake SWOT analysis: each group determines separately the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the studied area and then combine information collectively.
8. Compose research questions: Determine collectively what needs to be further researched and how.

Materials

- Map of study area in hardcopy mounted onto clip pad or digital form uploaded onto tablet with Wi-Fi access for manual or digital recording of site analysis data
- Pen, paper for clipboard or digital pen for tablet
- Sketchbook and pencils
- Digital camera or mobile phone for pictures
- Measuring tape or laser distance meter
- Folder to store handwritten or printed notes
- Flash disk to store information scanned or obtained by other bodies (e.g. libraries, archives, etc.)

Prerequisites

Basic training in landscape architecture / environmental science facilitates the site analysis process, as well as the understanding, interpretation and assessment of collected spatial information e.g. meteorological, hydrological, geological etc.

Time required

It depends on the ease of the availability of data. Provided there are none important obstacles the required time for collective landscape socio-spatial exploration for a neighbourhood (determined study area at 1.5 km radius) is approximately 6 months.

Number of people

Approximately 4 small groups of up to 5 people works well. Each individual group is assigned a particular area to study and work. Within each group people work independently or together, assisting one another in researching, recording or collecting spatial information. After completion of the site analysis all groups share information and collectively generate a map of the entire study area. Following a SWOT analysis is undertaken initially separately in each group and then collectively to generate more conclusive results. All groups, determine collectively what needs to be further researched and how.

Collective Comic for Landscape Narratives

Storytelling and action through comics

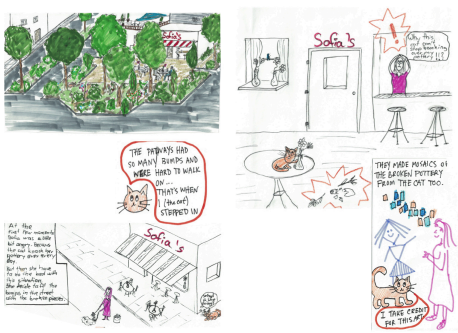


Figure 1. Comic created in the context of the Intensive course, Athens, 2024. Created by: Melina, Eszter, Caroline, Mike, Marinos, Atefeh, Marwin, Rafah, Elio, Sara

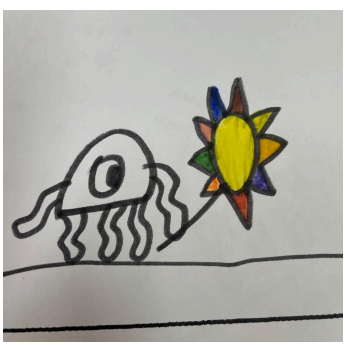


Figure 2: Character created in the context of a comic course, Athens, 2024. Curated by: Melina Vlachou, student's work

What is this, and what is it used for?

The "Collective Comic for Landscape Narratives" is a participatory method used to creatively explore and envision the past, present, and future of a study area through a collective comic. By collaboratively developing characters, stories, and visuals, participants analyze vulnerabilities, social dynamics, and environmental challenges within the landscape, collectively. The method cultivates participants' imagination and critical thinking by giving them the opportunity to envision future landscape transformations based on social, environmental, and economic factors. This approach is particularly useful for envisioning future scenarios, addressing complex spatial or social issues, and engaging communities in discussions about shared spaces. It combines storytelling, artistic expression, and collaboration to highlight and propose meaningful changes in the landscape.

Authors

Melina Vlachou, Eszter Toth, Caroline de Vries, Mike Venturelli

How is it done?

1. After walking through the area, analyse its characteristics by identifying the vulnerabilities and strengths, as well as the groups of people affected by these aspects. Consider who uses, works, or lives in this space.
2. Imagine how the area might have looked in the past and how it could evolve in the future, with or without necessary interventions. Reflect on how these changes relate to climate change and other external factors like social or political circumstances.
3. Create a character for each participant, defining personal traits such as age, likes/dislikes, occupation, and their relationship to the area. Establish a specific route or purpose for the character within the area, and write a short story about their connection to this.
4. Categorize the characters based on the locations they interact within the area, and map where and when their paths intersect. Use these intersections as the basis for creating the larger, collective narrative.
5. Develop interactions between the characters, either directly (e.g. conversations) or indirectly (e.g. shared relationships like teacher-student or pet-owner). Divide these interactions into scenes, determining the number and length of the scenes based on the scope of the story.
6. Sketch the characters and their surroundings. Each participant draws their character on small, color-coded papers with simple, clear features. Participants also sketch key locations (e.g., cafés, classrooms) and significant props (e.g. books, plants) relevant to their stories.
7. Bring the comic together by collaboratively drawing each frame and arranging them into a larger format. Place all frames on a larger sheet, ensuring the story flows cohesively, and decide on a title that captures the essence of the narrative.

Materials

- Map of the area
- Markers, pencils and/or pens
- Paper, Post its
- Tape, Scissors, Glue
- A large sheet or board for compiling the final comic
- Phones (to take pictures of the area for reference)
- Optional: Comics for inspiration

Prerequisites

- **Knowledge of the Area:** Participants and facilitators should have a basic understanding of the area being studied, including its history, cultural or social dynamics, and environmental context. A preliminary walk-through or study of maps/documents is essential.
- **Facilitator Preparation:** Facilitators need to be familiar with the process, ensuring they can guide participants effectively through analyzing the area, creating characters, and collaborating on the narrative.
- **Materials and Tools:** Gather necessary materials such as sketching paper, colored pencils, markers, scissors, glue, and a large sheet or board for compiling the final comic. Optionally, provide reference photos or maps of the area.
- **Basic Artistic Skills:** Participants don't need to be professional artists but should feel comfortable sketching simple characters, locations, and props. Facilitators might consider a short warm-up exercise for sketching.
- **Defined Objectives:** Clearly outline the goals of the method—whether it's to explore vulnerabilities in a landscape, understand social dynamics, or propose future interventions. These objectives guide the entire process.
- **Group Size and Time Management:** Plan for an appropriate number of participants to ensure meaningful collaboration. Set a schedule (e.g., five sessions) and allocate time for analysis, storytelling, sketching, and final assembly.
- **Collaborative Mindset:** Participants should be prepared to work in teams, share ideas, and incorporate others' input into the collective narrative. Establish ground rules for respectful and open communication.

Time required

1 week (more or less, 2-3 hours per day), but can be adapted to the needs and deadlines of each project.

Number of people

2 to 15 people (more or less), this method is to be done in groups

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Democratic Encounters of Landscape Architecture and Fine Art in the Anthropocene

Sculpture and fine art for landscape democracy



Artwork by Nafsika Tzanoulinou, co-created with Aikaterini Tsoni, Erai Molla-Halil and Aniela Lipińska, co-supervised by Katerina Athanasiou and Angeliki Paraskevopoulou (May 2024). Materials of sculpture were collected from the Agricultural University of Athens campus and included: recycled lamp post, chicken wire, wooden branches, soil, and hay.

What is this, and what is it used for?

The particular workshop is addressed to artists and landscape architects in developing art inspired by the local Anthropocene through democratic and participatory approaches. It examines how artistic and design practices can respond to environmental crises, social inequalities, and ecological changes, fostering dialogue and collaboration between disciplines. This method is useful for researchers, artists, designers, and policymakers in search for sustainable and democratic design strategies. It serves as a resource for academic study, professional practice, and community projects integrating art and landscape architecture for environmental and social resilience.

Authors

Angeliki Paraskevopoulou, Aikaterini Athanasiou

How is it done?

1. Project brief: landscape architects, community members brief artists on the studied area with text, images and site visits and identify the environmental and social challenges of the studied area to highlight through art.
2. Define the art concept: artists conceptualise and communicate the proposed art based on the project briefly to the landscape architects and community, discuss and exchange ideas and agree on a finalised concept.
3. Define spaces for art: artists together with landscape architects and the community propose potential areas for implementing the artwork and obtain permission from the pertinent authority.
4. Co-create art: artists collectively with landscape architects and the community employ ecological and sustainable practices, gather and/or purchase materials from the locality and co-create the artwork.
5. Disseminate, evaluate and adapt: following completion of the artwork, a multiplier event is organised to raise awareness, collect feedback from participants and the public and assess the ecological and social impact of the artwork and refine strategies for future democratic encounters of landscape architecture and fine art.

Materials

- Map of study area in hardcopy mounted onto clip pad or digital form uploaded onto tablet with Wi-Fi access for manual or digital notes during site visits
- Pen, paper for clipboard or digital pen for tablet
- Sketchbook and pencils
- Mobile phone for taking pictures and/or videos, and/or recording sound
- Measuring tape or laser distance meter to measure potential spaces for artwork
- Folder to store handwritten or printed notes
- Materials for the implementation of the artwork (employing environmental and sustainable practices).

Prerequisites

Trained landscape architects and artists lead the workshop. Any members of the studied area community can participate (no prerequisites needed).

Time required

It depends on the materials and size of the proposed artwork. Provided there are none important obstacles such as obtaining permission the required time for implementing the artwork is approximately 1–1.5 months.

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Number of people

Approximately small groups of up to 5 people work well. Each individual group is assigned a particular artwork. Within each group artists collaborate with landscape architects and coordinate members of the community in working independently and/or together, assisting one another in implementing the artwork. During breaks, group members visit other group members, exchange ideas and assist one another when necessary, after agreement with lead group artists.





Stages of creation: Artwork by Nafsika Tzanoulinou, co-created with Aikaterini Tsoni, Erai Molla-Halil and Aniela Lipińska, co-supervised by Katerina Athanasiou and Angeliki Paraskevopoulou (May 2024). Materials of sculpture were collected from the Agricultural University of Athens campus and included: recycled lamp post, chicken wire, wooden branches, soil, and hay. Photos: Ellen Fetzer and Caroline de Vries



Students in the Living Lab walk through the gardens of the Agricultural University of Athens. *Photo: Caroline de Vries*



Ravenna harbour and bird sanctuaries are interlinked
Photo: Ellen Fetzer

Ravenna + Cento, Italy

OLA Living Lab



What happens when nuns, citizens, businesses and institutions join forces to build a Renewable Energy Community?

Step into the inspiring Cento Living Lab, where the seeds of a small idea blossomed into a growing network of collaboration. Explore how participatory approaches and shared values turned challenges into opportunities, building a Renewable Energy Community committed to reinvesting in the common good.

Authors: Luigi Bartolomei, Veronica Lazzari, and Michael Venturelli

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Ravenna + Cento, Italy

OLA Living Lab

Landscape Context

The landscape from which our living lab emerged is the complex sea-city connection of Ravenna. This connection finds its physical manifestation in the Candiano Canal, a line of water that, with its 9 km length, links the city to the sea. Along this canal, many entities, activities, and functions overlap, creating a vibrant and sometimes chaotic ensemble. On the southern bank, this diversity has been harmonized by a promenade initiated by the Municipality through the Darsena project and the redevelopment of several former industrial buildings. However, this promenade ends at the intersection with the long-established industrial area beside the canal. To the south, it meets large industrial complexes, while to the north, it encounters a cluster of small warehouses, some of which are still used for artisanal activities supporting the fishing industry or for the construction of small boats.
The canal is not navigable and does not currently work as a link between the city and the sea due to the presence of bridges and, near the coast, due to its intersection with the commercial port. The analyses carried out by the students, already in the IP-intensive program phase, have been useful for mapping attendance, identifying homogeneous contexts, and tracking transformation processes.

Initially, the living lab engaged specifically with the community and the cyclists' Association (FIAB) to identify a continuous cycling route along the canal. Then, the favourable policies by the Emilia-Romagna Region for the creation of Renewable Energy Communities highlighted the presence of industrial warehouses, artisanal activities, and all those small manufacturing enterprises housed in a dense cluster of warehouses with unproductive roofs and relatively high energy consumption.

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Exploring landscape and communities in Ravenna, July 2022. *Photo: Ellen Fetzer*

This led the living lab to focus more on knitting solidarity nets among businesses, rather than on the connections between buildings. The regional policies rewarded the grassroots creation of sustainable communities, and our territory also revealed all the challenges of building trust mechanisms.

A distinctive feature (and the first and actual challenge) of the regional call was the social aspects of establishing RECs. The regional grant prioritized support for energy communities with significant social and territorial value, particularly those comprising economically vulnerable individuals, third-sector entities, public or social housing authorities, or remote contexts such as mountainous or inland areas. The law also encouraged projects that promote inclusion and solidarity in collaboration with third-sector organizations or local authorities.

In alignment with this regional initiative, the Open Landscape Academy (OLA) Italian Team has chosen to develop its Living Lab to support local communities engaged in the democratic transformation of landscapes, focusing specifically on RECs, starting from the Ravenna Industrial district. The Region's emphasis on forming energy communities, rather than merely installing solar panels, aligned with OLA's mission to facilitate the social aspects of REC formation.

This involved bringing together citizens, businesses, local authorities, informal groups, and associations to collectively decide on investments and manage the savings generated by the REC. Consequently, the OLA Team has offered its technical assistance to the winners of the regional call in the province of Ravenna and surrounding areas, aiming to empower these communities in their journey toward energy autonomy and democratic landscape transformation.

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Community and Power Map for Ravenna and Cento

Community Map

The first communities involved were those of stakeholders, organizations, associations, and groups of citizens and interests located along the Candiano Canal. The first association to be considered was FIAB, (https://www.fiabravenna.it/) due to its focus on light infrastructure and soft mobility connecting the sea and the city.

So, the regional initiative for Renewable Energy Communities (CER), combined with the risk of an energy crisis following the flood, made us consider not only the infrastructures but also the functions present within these infrastructures—namely, the entrepreneurial and artisanal activities, which are energy-intensive and, for the most part, housed in energy-inefficient buildings.

The creation of Renewable Energy Communities (CER) required building relationships and trust processes involving institutional horizons. It then occurred to us to create a Virtual Lounge where the components of the Ravenna administration, locally engaged in the construction of a CER, could meet other entities to exchange opportunities, problems, strategies, and solutions.

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Guided by its motto, 'empowering local communities,' our Ola Team made itself available especially to help foster bottom-up initiatives. Within this group, a small community in Cento asked for collaboration, and so we started a local living lab, fostering the birth of a local Renewable Energetic Community.

So the OLA ITALIAN TEAM conducted two parallel living labs:

a. one online " REC ONLINE LIVING ROOM" to ensure a platform for exchange and sharing opportunities, difficulties and challenges among entities, and institutions;

b. one in the city of Cento, assisting a small group of citizens and a monastery engaged in the construction of REC.

The first living lab experience, an online "living room", was an opportunity to share problems and, potentially, information, methods, progress, successes, and setbacks.

The second experience, on the other hand, was to provide support in an ongoing participation process at the time of writing, involving a real and complex process of REC realization on a civic scale.

Power Map

All the groups we interacted with (both online and on-site) held an intermediate position regarding REC project development. On the one hand, they aimed to expand the network of associations by including a wider number of citizens, public bodies, etc...; on the other, they needed to report their activities to the Emilia-Romagna Region. Shared interests include energy autonomy, economic well-being, and environmental sustainability.

Common challenges included managing inequalities and resolving bureaucratic barriers. It's interesting to note that the groups seemingly with the most power were, in fact, those that showed the greatest difficulties in establishing a CER within the living lab. The citizen communities proved to be more flexible in reaching the goal compared to institutional communities, which were hindered by heavier regulatory frameworks and stricter bureaucratic constraints.

Values

Core values show a quite wide spectrum among the two different groups we dealt with in our living labs. In the online forum, the organizations we reached out to with the intent of building a REC from distinct value perspectives and very different realities.

To understand these different value perspectives, it is necessary to comprehend the two main mechanisms on which a renewable energy community operates. First, it focuses on the internal production of electricity for its own use. Therefore, there is a tendency to create an energy balance between producers and consumers that ensures the community operates on a principle of self-sufficiency.

The second aspect follows from the fact that, in addition to the obvious economic benefit, there is also a state incentive for shared energy, which effectively ensures an increase in revenue the greater the amount of energy shared. This incentive means that when establishing a renewable energy community (REC), the awareness of shared values is decisive, even in understanding and deciding how to allocate the contribution received from the state. This cannot be decided afterwards. The commitment of a renewable energy community regarding the use of the funds received from the state incentives must be declared upfront, in the social charter. This is a challenge but it also provides the community a distinct identity.

Many methods can be used to achieve clarity around a common value, from group discussions to more complex processes and games, such as the "Watch Your Value" method, which we already used during the intensive program in Ravenna.

Research Questions

Participatory research focused on questions such as:

- How can we support communities in sharing energy?
- What values foster a common purpose?
- How can we address administrative barriers?

Process Diary

Building Renewable Energy Communities: The OLA Team's Journey

The OLA Italia team chose to focus on community empowerment. We began our work with the student community settled in the Darsena, a key area in the Power Map. Positioned between the sea and the city, the Darsena is home to multiple small communities and hosts a variety of productive activities.

The July 2023 Intensive Programme engaged international students and local stakeholders in developing projects to improve the area's environment.

A few months later, during the multiplier event in November 2023, one of these communities was selected, and the OLA team collaborated with FIAB (Federazione Italiana Amici della Bicicletta- Italian Federeation of Friends of the Bicycle), a key stakeholder in Ravenna, where cycling is widely used across all age groups. One major theme of the event was how to better connect the Tecnopolo of Marina di Ravenna (near the sea) with the city center.

In December 2023, the winners of the Regional Call for Renewable Energy Communities were announced. The focus of the RECs extends beyond energy savings, emphasizing the reinvestment of economic benefits into social and environmental projects within their communities.

The OLA team decided to build on its previous connections. The team reached out to stakeholders from the Intensive Programme, such as small boat manufacturers along the Darsena, to explore their interest in using their facilities for solar panel installations. However, none of these communities were interested in applying for the REC call.

As a result, OLA expanded its focus and contacted all the winners of the regional call in the province of Ravenna, offering support in facilitating participatory processes—an essential but often overlooked aspect of REC formation.

However, most of the winners were led by institutions or cooperatives already working with various consultants. As a result, they did not feel the need to actively engage with the OLA Team, as our focus on participatory processes was seen as less critical compared to the technical and bureaucratic aspects, especially given the tight timelines they faced.

Among all the stakeholders contacted, the only one that specifically requested direct support throughout the entire process was the Augustinian monastic community of Cento. They were already familiar with the OLA Team through the previous LED project, and their approach was deeply rooted in community participation, aligning closely with our expertise in facilitating inclusive and democratic processes.

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Cento Living Lab

The Living Lab in Cento originated from the vision of a small group of Augustinian nuns who wanted to establish a Renewable Energy Community (REC) to benefit the local area. The only religious community that participated in the regional call and won it. However, a renewable energy community cannot be created alone; it requires a community. By working alongside the religious community, it was decided to work in "concentric circles," sharing this victory with the closest "friends" among the members of the civil community.

A series of three meetings were held at the monastery in July 2024 and in September 2024, attended by the nuns and other stakeholders, "friends" of the religious community: common citizens, and in some cases, members or founders of other charitable or social organizations.

It was then decided to proceed in "concentric circles."
The renewable energy community “Energia in Comunione“ was formed by the friends who had gathered, as well as the legal entities they represented. In this way also "Tea Room" was involved, an association that promotes the social and employment inclusion of people with disabilities.

As soon as the renewable energy community was established and obtained official legal recognition, unfortunately, the mother superior of the religious community that had been at the origin of the process was diagnosed with a very serious illness, which led to her death within two months.

The remaining nuns then decided to move to a larger monastery, which introduced a new challenge for the newly formed renewable energy community, whose solar panels were originally meant to be installed on the large roofs of the cloistered monastery.

Fortunately, in the meantime, the community participation efforts had successfully formed a growing community interested in joining the REC association.

Meanwhile, some private individuals and the parishes of Cento had considered joining the renewable energy community, offering their rooftops for the installation of the panels. At the same time, a series of four meetings had been planned to inform the public about both the technical functioning of a renewable energy community and its significance. The first one of these meeting took place in Penzale (in Cento Suburbs) on December 9th, while the other gathering will be on February 11th, March 10th, April 2nd, with a program that was part of a graphic project created by the Ghirardacci Study Center, designed to be shared both online and through posters displayed throughout the town of Cento.

The first meeting, purely informational, took place on a very cold evening in an unheated venue and gathered the participation of over 100 people.

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For this reason, on the one hand, we established an “online living lab”, to guarantee all winners the possibility to share their challenges and timetable; on the other, we concentrated our efforts on the community in Cento, where direct citizen involvement was considered a priority. Here, the importance of debating how to use the incentive for the common good was strongly felt, making it an ideal setting for our participatory approach to thrive.
These activities resulted in the realization of two parallel living labs: the one online, the other on-site.

The first is the Ravenna virtual Living Lab, a kind of an online "living room," designed to maintain an open dialogue with the winners of the regional call in the Ravenna province. The second Living Lab was held in person in Cento, focusing on the process inaugurated by the monastic community of the Augustinian nuns who won the Regional grant.

Ravenna Living Lab

In March 2023, all winners of the regional call within Ravenna Province were contacted by phone. On April 8, the first video conference was held with representatives from municipalities, cooperatives, and private entities. Each participant briefly presented their project, explaining the challenges they were facing. The meeting proved to be an important and unexpected opportunity for dialogue and exchange among the stakeholders involved.

On May 6, a second online meeting followed, with discussions centred on the legal structures suitable for RECs and persistent barriers, such as limited incentives and technical inadequacies from consulting agencies. Key challenges identified included: Tight deadlines for legal entity formation by July 2024; Ambiguity in participatory approaches due to low incentives; Technical and administrative hurdles; Public entities acting as primary drivers rather than facilitators, potentially overshadowing community-led initiatives.

In September 2024, a survey was conducted to assess the progress of REC formation among stakeholders.

In October 2024 we invited participants in the Living Lab to join a virtual "web salon" where we planned to share the positive experiences of the Cento Living Lab and the CISE initiative (Center for Innovation and Economic Development), a special agency of the Chamber of Commerce of Romagna. Through the regional call, CISE had successfully initiated a REC managed by the Chamber of Commerce in Cesena.

This outcome highlights the effectiveness of the community-building process, demonstrating how collective interest and collaboration can sustain initiatives even in the face of unforeseen challenges.

Thanks to the efforts to engage citizens, the Cento initiative succeeded in developing an increasingly large community of people interested in joining the REC. This progress has been so significant that a second civic assembly is scheduled for February 2025.

Impact of the Living Lab

The impact was measured through outputs (number of CERs created: 1 in Cento and 3 In Ravenna) outcomes (improved social connections), and- in the future- broader impacts (growing economic well-being, growing energy independence). The impact of the territorial living lab in Cento was already measurable in the early meetings to which the newly established CER invited the local population. There was a great deal of interest in the emergence of this shared energy network, which fueled attendance at meetings and gatherings. The CER organized 4 public meetings to announce its creation and engage as many users as possible. Around 150 people attended the first meeting.



Reflection: Failures and Success Factors

Ravenna Living Lab

Several challenges were encountered during the process. Administrative and logistical issues posed significant barriers, and some RECs could not be established due to difficulties that could not be resolved within the grant's deadlines. The geographical dispersion of stakeholders necessitated the reliance on online-only meetings, which limited opportunities for deeper dialogue.

Additionally, while many communities were created primarily due to the regional incentive, the focus often shifted away from environmental sustainability and collective well-being, leaning instead toward economic benefits. This imbalance highlighted the need for stronger integration of participatory and sustainability-oriented goals in future initiatives.

Despite these setbacks, the process also showcased key successes. The creation of 3 RECs and the broader awareness raised among stakeholders demonstrated the potential of collaborative frameworks.

Cento Living Lab

The initiative's successes, including the REC establishment and the growing awareness among stakeholders about the importance of community engagement and sustainability, have already been detailed above.

As for failures, none have been identified at this stage. The process remains on track, and the outcomes so far indicate that the strategies implemented have been effective in addressing challenges and achieving the project's goals.

Transferable Approaches from this Living Lab

Transferable methods include participatory approaches, flexible governance models, and practical templates for CER implementation.

Key methods involved direct community engagement, overcoming institutional-private barriers, and fostering co-creation.

There are two elements or methods believed to be transferable. The first is the "concentric circles method", which has proven successful so far for the REC in Cento. This method involves progressive growth in the group of promoters and participants, starting with the most motivated individuals and, from them, using a logic of enthusiasm contagion for the project. This was a method spontaneously developed by the monastic community but then applied with a certain rigour. It involves expanding the group only when each individual who is part of the association is sufficiently prepared to explain the reasons behind the project to others.

Future plans include consolidating the CER in Cento. Looking ahead, a key focus will be on expanding and strengthening the community network. Efforts will be directed toward increasing public awareness about the benefits of Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) and fostering greater participation from local citizens, businesses, and organizations.

This includes hosting additional civic assemblies, workshops, and informational events to ensure inclusivity and engagement across all stakeholder groups. By providing platforms for dialogue and collaboration, we aim to cultivate a sense of shared purpose and collective responsibility for the REC's success.

Furthermore, initiatives will be implemented to support community-led decision-making on how to reinvest economic benefits from the REC for the common good, reinforcing trust and commitment among members. The ultimate goal is to build a resilient and self-sustaining community capable of driving long-term social and environmental transformation.

Communication channels in the local language

Key channels used include CIFLA's website and social media platforms, updated regularly in Italian. This was deemed sufficient to reference the OLA project in general. Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) targeted diverse territories, each engaging their local citizens. As such, establishing a unified communication channel directed at all communities would not have been practical or meaningful. Instead, each REC was responsible for communicating directly with its specific stakeholders, ensuring localized and effective outreach tailored to their needs. For this reason, no dedicated communication channels in Italian were created for the project.

However, CIFLA effectively leveraged its social media channels to promote multiplier events and share project updates, enhancing visibility and engagement.
As mentioned, the REC in Cento has implemented communication both online and through graphic materials on the streets of Cento via a series of posters and billboards

References

Primary references include regional documents on CERs, survey results, and OLA Charta guidelines.

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Authors + Contacts



Luigi Bartolomei
Luigi Bartolomei, Ph.D. in Architectural Composition (2008) at the University of Bologna, is well-known for his research regarding sacred architecture, history of sacred architecture and participatory landscape design. He promoted, in collaboration with the University of Bologna, some preeminent initiatives in the field of religious cultural heritage. In 2019 he promoted the first national summer school regarding the reuse of religious cultural heritage, organizing a ten-day summer camp in Lucca where students were asked to design new functions for the dismissed monastery of St. Augustin. This Experience was then published in a special number of In_Bo, (vol. 12, n.6) and remains one of the fundamental researches on the reuse of dismissed cultural heritage in Europe. In 2022, as a collaborator of "The Pontifical Council for Culture", he has been among the promoters of the International Conference "Charisma and Creativity". He also collaborates with the National Office for Ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage and Religious Buildings of the CEI – Conference of Italian Bishops, where he has been a tutor for he participatory national lab for new churches.

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Veronica Lazzari
Veronica Lazzari works at Fondazione Flaminia on EU projects focused on public engagement, communication, and social innovation in landscape and community development. With extensive experience in fostering collaboration between institutions, local communities, and stakeholders, Veronica is dedicated to promoting inclusive and innovative approaches to knowledge sharing. Her work bridges the gap between scientific research and society, empowering communities to actively participate in shaping sustainable landscapes and resilient environments. As a trained counselor, she brings a unique sensitivity to facilitating dialogue and co-creation processes in living labs and participatory projects.

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Michael Venturelli
Michael Venturelli is a passionate architect with a deep commitment to sustainable living and eco-friendly design, with expertise in sustainable city management and ecological transition. Graduate with a thesis project on sustainable design and urban regeneration. Trained in democratic participatory processes and sustainable city management, with a focus on energy and environmental regeneration. Experienced tutor and workshop organizer dedicated to promoting nature-friendly landscapes, advocating for the value of urban nature and biodiversity.

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- Raul Mosconi – Senior Director of Azienda Servizi alla Persona of Ravenna, Cervia, and Russi
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- Ing. Giovanna Benvenuti – Environmental and territorial engineer, consultant for leading companies in photovoltaic power generation; during the Living Lab, consultant for Unione Comuni Bassa Romagna
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- Elisabetta Cavalazzi – Consultant for Legacoop

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Methods from the Living Lab

Transferable tools used in the Ravenna and Cento Living Lab to inspire your local lab

Concentric Circles

Growth through dedicated action



Figure 1: Meeting with a group of local members.

What is this, and what is it used for?

Starting a process with a group of very few people and then going on by concentric circles including more and more members.

Authors

Luigi Bartolomei and Cento Nuns

How is it done?

1. You start with very few interested, highly motivated people who share very precise ideals and have a very good relationship with each other. You start by defining with them an objective to be achieved (e.g. signing a treaty, setting up an association, etc.).
2. The aim is to outline a scheme and a common way of thinking that will enable the creation of shared rules and values. This is the centre.

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3. Then, when everyone is convinced and, above all, when they are able to become promoters and actors of their reality, the circle can be widened concentrically.
4.More and more people will be involved who are attracted by the same ideas, the same intentions and the same opportunities, to the point where real citizens' assemblies can be organised even for those who are less familiar with the dynamics, leading to further expansion.

Materials

- People, some papers and documents, everything usual to take notes and draw schemes.

Prerequisites

People must know eachother or at least share some strong values and ideas.

Time required

Every session requires a few hours, the entire process can require months.

Number of people

At the beginning, the ideal number is maybe 4 or 5 people, few but good, but at the end, the amount needed for the process is defined by what purpose and diffusion you want to reach.

The Social/Civic Hourglass

Addressing groups as participants



Figure 1: Addressing a group as participants for a local initiative. Photo source:

What is this, and what is it used for?

When addressing large, diverse groups, it's crucial to engage them as participants, not just listeners. This helps overcome the silence and shyness often present in large crowds, ensuring active involvement in the discussion.

Authors

Luigi Bartolomei and CER partners

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How is it done?

1. You are addressing groups who have been involved in town hall meetings and who are clearly very different from those who attend small meetings of a few interested people.
2. To do this, you need to make them participants, even if you are addressing a very large audience. you need to break the silence and shyness of a large crowd.
3. To achieve this, it is useful to divide the audience into small groups; instead of asking each person a single question, ask a group question and the group logic comes into play.
4. Some will make a group of people who are already familiar with the topic or who know each other, they will then have a closer and more talkative dynamic. Others will form a group with casual neighbours at the time. In both cases, in order to limit and focus the group discussion in the former case, or to stimulate dialogue in the latter case, guiding figures such as facilitators are important. It is important that there is a controlled flow of conversation in the room, and a well-timed and limited amount of time should be given so that people do not get lost.
5. An hourglass can be used as an aid, which also makes it a game and divides the discussion time into phases.

Materials

- People, some papers and documents, everything usual to take notes and draw schemes.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites.

Time required

Ideal sessions of 15/20 mins.

Number of people

Unlimited

Watch Your Values

Collectively identifying value(s) and purpose(s)

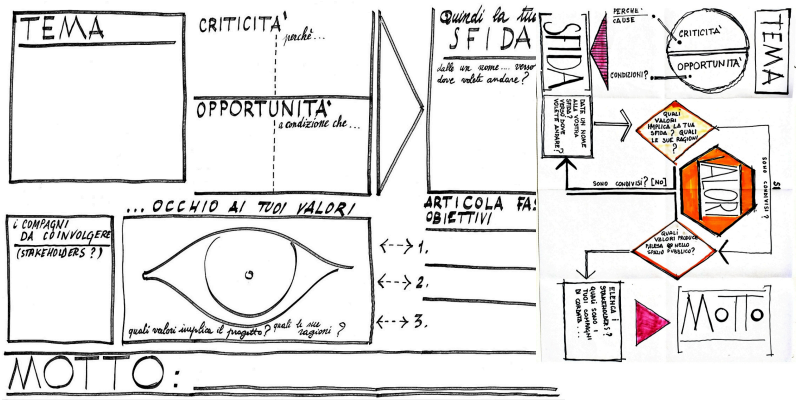


Figure 1: Worksheet used for method.

What is this, and what is it used for?

The "Watch Your Values" method helps groups or communities define their purpose and priorities. It involves discussing the issue, identifying critical points and opportunities, prioritizing challenges, and determining key stakeholders. The method then focuses on clarifying and sharing guiding values through interactive exercises like the eye or spiral method. The process concludes with defining actionable steps and creating a motto that encapsulates the group's values and goals. It's useful for clarifying direction and fostering collective decision-making.

Authors

Luigi Bartolomei

How is it done?

1. Watch your values' is a system for understanding what the purpose and priorities of a group/community are.
2. You start by discussing the issue, identifying the problem you want to address: what you are talking about. At this stage it is useful to brainstorm to come up with more than one and then vote on the most appropriate and shared one.
3. Then it is necessary to be clear about the critical points of the issue, to name them, but also to give reasons, if there are opportunities, which ones and under what conditions. In the light of these criticalities and opportunities, the theme configures a challenge, which at this point is itself a prioritisation derived from the theme, criticalities and opportunities.
4. Then it has to be decided who are the companions on the journey, i.e. who are the stakeholders who need to be involved in the process at some point. Now you need to establish a bit of the central point by defining what are the values that guide the group.
5. The game then becomes collective and can be played in one of two ways, using the eye or the spiral: in the first case, identify all the values to focus on; in the second, promote the shared values.
6. In both schemes, it is useful to use post-it notes to ask each person what the values are; it is advisable to avoid single words but to explain them in short sentences. In the spiral method, sentences are added at the top or in the middle. This is followed by a discussion phase in which the most common sentences are selected.
7. To increase the sense of concreteness, there is also the breakdown of the process (i.e. how to achieve the goal defined at the beginning) by defining steps, actions.
8. Finally, the group is asked to come up with a motto, which should be a synthesis of the values and themes.

Materials

- Printed templates and rules
- Post-its of various dimensions
- Markers and pens, anything else coloured to help link thoughts
- Paper for writing / drawing

Prerequisites

A minimum interest or knowledge of the topic addressed and/or ability to work in groups.

Time required

Overall a few hours, divided in sessions of 15/20 mins.

Number of people

Groups of 4 to 6 people are ideal, best 5 + 1 external guide.

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Collaborative Landscape Mapping

Identifying key elements, challenges, and opportunities through a participatory process



Figure 1: Team members mapping with community members. Photo: Ellen Fetzer

What is this, and what is it used for?

This exercise engages living lab participants in the co-creation of a local landscape map, identifying key elements, challenges, and opportunities. Through a participatory process, community members share their knowledge and experiences to develop a collective understanding of the territory and promote innovative solutions.

Authors

OLA team partners

OLA

How is it done?

1. **Introduction and group formation (30 minutes):** Facilitators introduce the exercise's objective and divide participants into small, diverse groups, ensuring a broad range of skills and perspectives.
2. **Exploration of the area (1–2 hours):** Groups walk through different parts of the landscape, documenting significant features through photographs, notes, and sketches. During the exploration, they identify strengths, critical issues, and potential areas for intervention.
3. **Creation of the collaborative map (1 hour):** Upon returning, groups use the provided materials (posters, markers, stickers) to create a collective map representing their observations. Each group presents their section, explaining their choices and findings.
4. **Discussion and analysis (1 hour):** Participants discuss the created maps, highlighting recurring themes, differences, and potential solutions to identified issues. This phase fosters dialogue and mutual understanding within the community.
5. **Synthesis and planning of future actions (30 minutes):** Based on the previous discussions, the group identifies concrete actions to improve the landscape, assigning responsibilities and defining timelines for the proposed initiatives.

Materials

- Paper maps of the area of interest
- Large sheets and posters
- Markers, coloured pencils, and stickers
- Cameras or smartphones for photographic documentation
- Notepads and pens

Prerequisites

- Preliminary knowledge of the area of interest
- Participants with diverse skills and backgrounds
- Facilitators experienced in participatory processes

Time required

Approximately 4–5 hours

Number of people

All the people present at the workshop. Better with groups of 5 people.



Exploring a multilayered landscape by bicycle
Photo: Ellen Fetzer



Entrance to the train station from the Nürtingen central bus station
Photo: Ellen Fetzer

Nürtingen, Germany

OLA Living Lab



Collaborative mapping
Photo: Karl Michael Lange

How can we incorporate youth voices into planning processes to enhance quality of life and create a city with climate-adaptive, functional infrastructure?

Through a series of methods, the Nürtingen Bus Station Living Lab dives creatively into the process of intergenerational participatory design. Amidst challenges of limited land, economic growth, urban sprawl, and the pressure to balance grey infrastructure with green spaces, this lab engages and listens to youth to elevate their voices and ideas for a sustainable future.

Authors: Anna Szilágyi-Nagy, Caroline de Vries,
Consulting Partners: Ellen Fetzer, Karl Michael Lange

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Nürtingen, Germany

OLA Living Lab

Landscape Context

The Nürtingen Bus Station is often the first place someone sets foot in Nürtingen. It is a site of rhythms, set in a context of concrete and asphalt. At each hour interval the station comes to a frenzied hustle when the buses arrive, amassing in the movement of bodies, greetings, unlocking of bicycles, and pulling luggage up steep stairs. In between intervals, idle buses stand by on break, crows caw on their perches, and clouds of cigarette smoke fill the air. In these quieter moments, the soft rush of water is heard near the eastern side of the station, where the Tiefenbach stream is diverted from the open to underground pipes beneath the concrete.

Nürtingen is a town of over 40.000 residents, located near to the polycentric region of Stuttgart, Ludwigsburg, Esslingen and Böblingen in Baden-Württemberg Germany. The region benefits from a strong economy driven by automotive and technological industries, attracting talent from across Germany and beyond. However, this success has led to intense pressure on limited land resources, with both industry and housing competing for space. Urban densification is prioritized, but suburban sprawl continues as commuters seek residence in smaller towns in the region, causing strain on the transportation networks.

This polycentric region faces a critical challenge: balancing the need for grey infrastructure (housing, industry, transport) with the preservation of green spaces essential for climate resilience and quality of life. Trade-offs between compact urban growth and climate adaptation highlight the complexity of sustainable regional development. Nürtingen faces this challenge alongside its wider region. The bus station and connected train station provide an ideal entry point to show an example of urban transformation that addresses the challenges faced throughout the region.

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Nürtingen Bus Station. *Photo Source: C. de Vries*

The Living Lab seeks the voices of youth and locals, to improve quality of life and build a city that provides the infrastructure needed for a both a climate-adaptive and functional future. Through this tangle of pedestrians, buses, and bicycles, many school children make their daily walk to the local school. Additionally, the local youth center called the Jugendhaus am Bahnhof (JaB) - or the Youth Center at the Train Station, is located at the southeast corner of the bus station site. In this context, the living lab found an opportunity to engage young members of the community in a relevant context.

The following story shares the results and ongoing discussion of the lab.

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Community Map

During the 2023 Landscape Forum, this Living Lab was conducted, to engage others about how they might envision the future of the Nürtingen bus station.

LANDSCAPE FORUM

The Landscape Forum is an annual European event that aims to discuss the challeng-es of a given local landscape from a wide variety of perspectives and disciplines. In 2023, the Nürtingen-Geislingen University hosted the meeting.

Participants of the Landscape Forum – landscape architecture, architecture, land-scape planning, urban planning, practitioners, researchers, students, local residents, as well as organisational and municipal leaders – gathered in Nürtingen to rethink the Tiefenbach Valley, which runs from the Swabian Alb through the urban area of Nürtingen to the Neckar River.

The Landscape and Democracy Working Group is one of the working groups of the Landscape Forum, whose international participants are to give a voice to the landscape from the perspec-tive of the people living in the landscape.

LOCAL SCHOOL AND ORGANISATIONS

This Living Lab was made in partnership with the youth of the Max-Planck-Gymnasium, who served as wonderful tour guides for the members of the landscape democracy team. Youth participants showed us how they use the bustling bus station on a daily basis, what they liked and what they didn't like about it. With their help, we not only understood what the bus station means to you, but we were also able to formulate the first proposals so that the bus station could be an attractive place for all youth in Nürtingen.

We also thank the youngsters and workers of the Jugendhaus am Bahnhof (JaB) youth center who helped us to coordinate this Living Lab. Several workers kindly answered questions and thus supplemented the results of the Youth Engagement Workshop, and the JaB youth center also for provided a comfortable inoddor space for member of the Landscape Democracy Working Group to continue work and reflect as a group on the Lab findings.

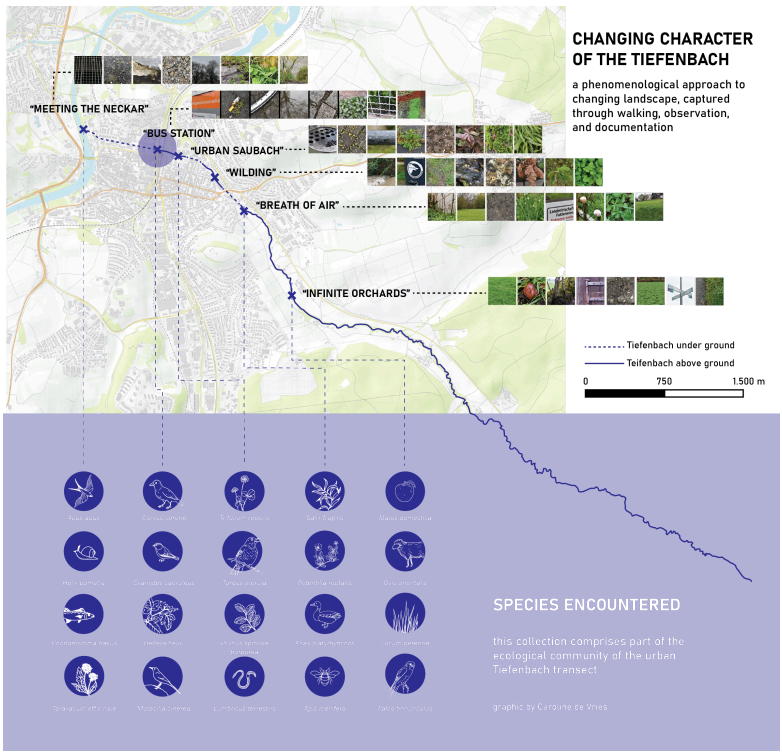
THE CITY OF NÜRTINGEN

We thank the City of Nürtingen for the smooth cooperation and for allowing us to use ZOB to conduct this Lab, and for giving us all the necessary permission to implement the youth engagement workshop. We hope that, with the help of the Zukunft ZOB document, one of the written outcomes of this Living Lab, we will be able to involve the voice of young people in the development of the city and the bus station.

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ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITY

Another important component of the local community are non-human species. While this Living Lab focused on the voices of youth, we acknowledge the opportunity to include participatory workshops that include the larger ecological community.

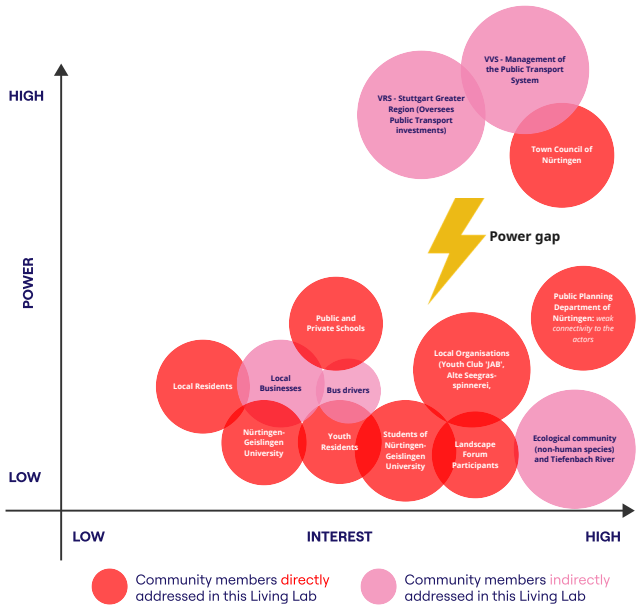


While the Living Lab was focused on the area around the bus station, the river than runs underneath transects the Tiefenbach Valley. This images shows a photo collage of landscape elements and species encountered through walking the Tiefenbach Valley. *Image Source: Caroline de Vries*

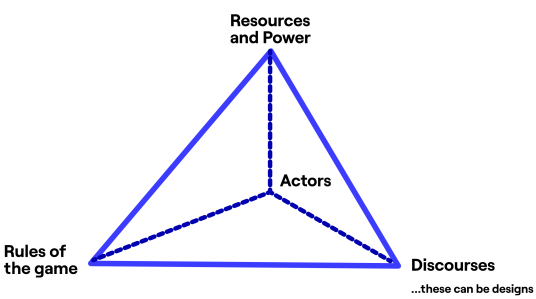
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Power Map

Below is an abbreviated power map for the context of the Nürtingen Living Lab with a focus on the activities conducted around the central bus station since 2023.



Abbreviated power map of Nürtingen for the context of the Living Lab at the Bus station. Source: Caroline de Vries and Arati Uttur



Policy arrangement visualized as a tetrahedron
Source: Duncan Liefferink, 2006

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Values

This particular lab was centered around listening. A defining part of the process included listening to the youth voices as they showed us their routes to school from their perspectives. During these walks, the working group participants would travel the routes together with the students, asking questions and letting the student take the lead so we as planners could learn from local insight. Activities to then further record what the youth participants saw in their local landscapes followed, including the Tiny Protest, collaborative mapping, and other techniques mentioned in the "methods" section of this report.

At the initial start of this living lab, the OLA Charta had not yet been written. However, at the 2023 Landscape Forum, a co-creation session identified the following values: Inclusive landscapes, collaboration, valuing nature, empathy, trust, respect, equality and equity, climate change, education, and attention to process.

These conversations throughout the Landscape Forum sessions, and the work done in the Landscape Democracy Working Group and Living Lab, helped to shape the conversations and build a community that would continue to be developed in living labs with OLA that followed.



Warm-up activity led by the facilitors of the Landscape Democracy Working Group team at the 2023 Landscape Forum before conducting the workshop. The activites helped to foster deeper listening, understanding, and joy into the process, to ensure a good start the the workshop. Photo: Aiga Spage

Research Questions

Why engage youth at the ZOB?

The goal of the Landscape and Democracy Working Group was to involve the people of Nürtin-gen in the rethinking of the ZOB, and during this process it paid special attention to the involve-ment of young people.

Designing landscapes to be inclusive of the needs of young people in Nürtingen helps improve the comfort and safety for all. Including youth in landscape transformation is not only part of lo-cal municipal regulation (41a), but has many co-benefits as well.

We organised a special Youth Engagement Workshop for the secondary school students attend-ing school in the vicinity of the ZOB and talked to youth from the Jugendhaus am Bahnhof who use the ZOB. With these activities, we wanted to underline that young people have the right and duty to transform the Nürtingen landscape and that it is necessary and worthwhile to define the future of ZOB with all members of the community, including the young people. The Group wanted to learn about how young people perceive the ZOB and what aspirations they have regarding its design.

Additional research questions for this living lab include:

- How do people influence the landscape of the bus station?
- How does the landscape of the bus station influence the behavior, mood, relationship, and freedom of the people?
- Who or what has the highest influence on what is happening at the place?
- How can we move up on the ladder of participation?
- What does co-creation mean in this context?
- Democratic landscape transformation: Why is it relevant?

Process Diary

Youth Engagement Workshop

On the morning of June 29, 2023, we organised a Youth Engagement Workshop for the secondary school students of the Max-Planck-Gymnasium, one of the two state high schools in Nürtingen. The school is just around the corner from the bus station.

During the 120-minute workshop, the young people were able to meet the adults of the Landscape and Democracy Working Group from different countries, with whom they could share their views on the present and future of the ZOB in German and English. The various activities of the workshop – including a familiarisation game, tandem walk, joint mapping exercise, and formulation of "Playmobil wishes" – helped us to see the ZOB from the perspective of youth participants, and how to formulate development proposals that take their needs into account in this document.

Informal discussions with the young people of the Jugendhaus

In addition to the workshop, we also spoke with members of the youth centre at the ZOB. The youth centre, Jugendhaus am Bahnhof (JaB) is located in the immediate vicinity of the central bus station, which carries out youth work in Nürtingen in accordance with the Child and Youth Protection Act. Youth work directly targets children and young people, and by involving them in the design of the programs, the house offers an attractive pro-gram that meets the interests and needs of the youth. Thus, what happens at the bus sta-tion is an important question for the young people who are members of the JaB.

We were able to talk to the young people associated with JaB at the "Who's on the Street" event. The event on July 29, 2023 was organised by the city of Nürtingen and IBA'27 in the framework of the "Bahnstadt Nürtingen" project. During the podium discussion starting at 5:00 p.m., the staff and young people of the Jugendhaus took care of the refreshments, and after the discussion, the music. In this way, we were able to meet the young people from the JaB and learn about the needs of these young people in relation to the ZOB in an informal conversation.

Analysis and Synthesis of Results into Design Principles

After the workshop, responses from the participants was collected and presented into a report in order to share the ideas, challenges and desires expressed by young people from Nürtingen. From the analysis of the answers of the young people in Nürtingen, we formulated planning principles for the development of the ZOB.

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WORKSHOP PROCESS

1

Get to know each other

Students met with their tandem partners through an interactive game.





2

Tandem Walks and Chalk Drawings

Students showed their tandem partners their daily paths to school.

Students marked areas that they liked, found dangerous, or had opinions on in chalk on the ground throughout the walk.





3

Mapping the Walk

All groups returned to the bus station. Students marked their paths on a large map of the area with yarn, and placed sticky dots and notes on areas that they liked, found dangerous, or had their own ideas on how to improve the area.





4

Playmobil Wishes and Sharing

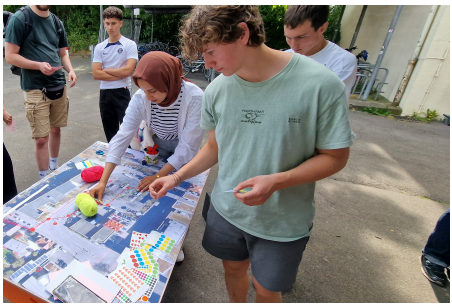
Students chose a Playmobil figure that represented themselves. They the wrote their overall wishes for the bus station on a small sign that the Playmobil figure could hold, together forming a “Tiny Protest” or a collective representation of their wishes.

Students also shared their opinions aloud in the group to each other.

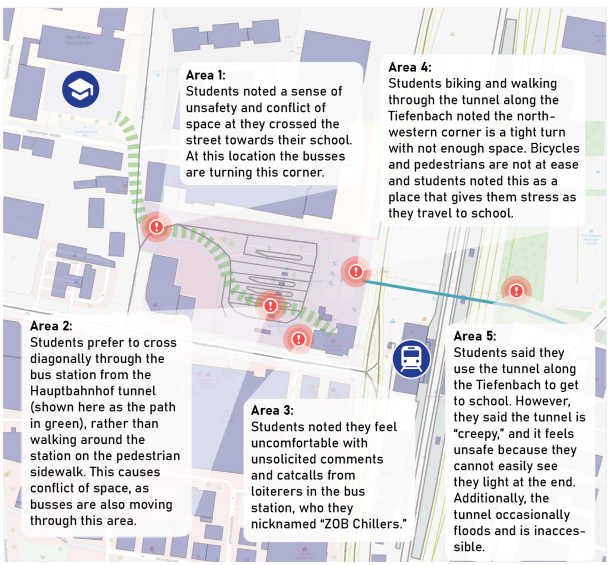








Students gather after the Tandem Walk to record responses on a collaborative mapping activity.
Photos: Karl Michael Lange



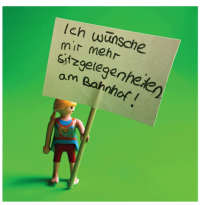
Above: Digitization and summary of student responses on the conflicts within the bus station on their route to school. Left page: Graphic illustrating the process of the workshop.
Graphics: Caroline de Vries

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MOSAIC OF YOUTH VOICES



Photos: Karl Michael Lange, Graphic: Caroline de Vries


Ich wünsche mir mehr Sitzgelegenheiten am Bahnhof!


Ich wünsche mir einen Kaffeestand zu der Schule


- mehr Sitzgelegenheiten
- mehr Bäume/ Pflanzen
- schönere Gestaltung


Zugang zum
Wasser


• Kiosk
• Elevator
• CLOCK
• Supermarket


Mehr GRÜN


I want to feel save and comfortable and not harassed and scared to be run over by a bus!!!

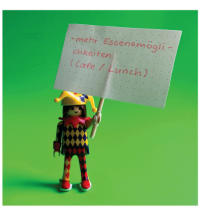

+ mehrere Möglichkeiten to hang out with friends !
+ schönere Gestaltung (wie mit Pflanzen)


Mehr Kunst am Bahnhof
More art around the bus station

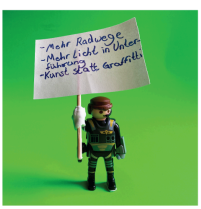

als erholsamer, relaxing place


eine Uhr mit der Uhrzeit !! fehlt hier ☺


Halt stopp!
• Vorsichtig fahren bei dem Übergang beim Fußgängerstreifen

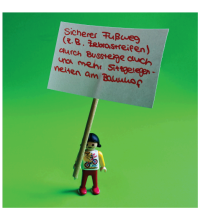

- mehr Essensmöglichkeiten (Cafe / Lunch)


MORE GREEN SPACE
Make room for
PEOPLE NOT CARS!!!


-Mehr Radwege
-Mehr Licht in Unterführungen
-Kunst statt Graffiti


Wasser
Grünflächen


more plants and trees


Sicherer Fußweg (z.B. Zebrastreifen) durch Bushaltestelle und mehr Sitzgelegenheiten am Bahnhof


Make Nürtingen GREEN Again


Fahrradfahrer nehmen auf Fußgängerwegen

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DESIGN PRINCIPLES FROM STUDENT RESPONSES: SUMMARY

Green Areas Safety Seating Accessibility Pedestrian Pathways



After all the data and responses were collected, themes were analysed and consolidated to show emerging trends in design principles. *Graphic: Caroline de Vries*

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Impact of the Living Lab

The methodology of the Youth Engagement Workshop shows an example of how young people can be involved in landscape transformation processes, and how, with their participation, land-scapes can be created that also serve the well-being of young people.

To document and communicate the process and results, a written report, “Zukunft ZOB”, was prepared after the workshop for the City of Nürtingen by the Landscape and Democracy Working Group of the 2023 Landscape Forum.

The report was received and reviewed by the city of Nürtingen, and discussion is currently underway.

The results of the Youth Engagement Workshop can help guide the current leaders of Nürtingen’s landscape transformation processes to make the ZOB better meet the needs of the youth.



Design decisions made at the bus station have a lasting impact on the people who traverse this area daily. *Photo Source: Ellen Fetzer*

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Reflection: Failures and Success Factors

The workshop successfully integrated students from the local school into a planning process. Through the prompts and activities, students opened up and shared their experiences through a walk, collaborative mapping, and other techniques. Activities were well-set up and included many local partnerships, including the local school, the youth center, and participants from the Landscape Forum. This lab also created a publication that allowed the results of the lab to the City of Nürtingen.

Hosting a living lab during the Landscape Forum, with experts in landscape architecture, planning fields, and other leaders from throughout Europe and the world made this particularly fascinating and engaging. We were able to conduct the lab and activities and then share the process and methods with fellow experts and students of the field simultaneously. It was a valuable, challenging, and inspiring experience that can be readily recommended to anyone interested in research and exchange of ideas in participatory design and co-creation.

We learned through this process that it is very important to document all aspects of the living lab. There were many techniques used throughout the process of a living lab. Many have been recorded, and in the midst of a well-programmed and captivating conference, it was difficult to record all that occurred. A great deal of work went into recording and documenting the living lab and the results, which was able to be presented to the City. However, there were inevitability conversations and ideas that were left unrecorded that could have been valuable. Regardless, we believe that these learnings are also held in the minds of those who experienced them, and despite the efforts made to record all, that there is also inherent value in all that was not documented. That being said, having a delegated person or team to document all consistently is very helpful and recommended for future living labs.

Additionally, we would have liked to have a second meeting with the youth participants after we completed our analysis. This way we could show the trends, design principles, and any early ideas we had since developed to the students from the local Gynamsium and cross-reference our findings. Did we hear them correctly? After they see these translations or iterations of their responses spark further ideas or questions? This opens up further opportunities for valuable co-creation.

Transferable Approaches from this Living Lab

There are a number of methods listed in methods section that follows.

For engagement with youth participants, it it is valuable to have a set of pre-organised activities that they can explore with and find their own way. Games and other activities help create a context that feels organised and inclusive. This can bring a fruitful environment where each participant is able to contribute to the living lab in a meaningful way. Activities must have meaning, but not be too difficult.

For the context of this lab several activities were prepared, which can be explored in the method section of this publication. You may find that they are adaptable for use in your local context, which is encouraged. Wishing the best as you engage in your local landscapes and please do not hesitate to contact the OLA team with any questions.

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Communication channels in the local language

The results of the living lab are communicated on the OLA Website, as well as in the publication *Zufunkt ZOB*, available in both German and English. A link for download is available below.

The publication goes deeper into the process of the living lab with more details, interviews with locals, and other information.

"Zukunft ZOB" Publication, available on the OLA website in both German and English. *The publication goes deeper into the process and shows details of the living lab.*

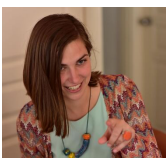
Available for download below:



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Authors + Contacts

Authors:



Anna Szilágyi-Nagy is a MSc landscape architect. Her areas of expertise are built environment education, playful and experience-based youth participation, and the design and research of analog board games that involve the population in solving landscape issues. Anna is a PhD candidate at the University of Tübingen and president of kultúrAktív Egyesület.



Caroline de Vries is a recent graduate and holds a MEng.in Landscape Architecture and a MSc. in Sustainability Management. A main theme in her work is the concept of "designing for life" – or processes that elevate the support of life systems both for people and nature, particularly in areas where land meets water. She supports the Open Landscape Academy in local and international workshops, and looks forward to a future that integrates both research and practice in inclusive landscape architecture designs.

Consulting partners:



Dr. Ellen Fetzer holds a diploma and a doctoral degree in landscape architecture from Kassel University, Germany. At Nürtingen-Geislingen University she is primarily coordinating the international masters in landscape architecture. Beyond landscape architecture, she is passionate about computer-supported collaborative learning in transnational settings, systems thinking and social innovation. Ellen is immediate past-president of ECLAS (www.eclas.org), the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools.



Karl Michael Lange is a graduate engineer in urban and regional planning, and actively runs a studio for transformation design in the cultural sector and educational projects for sustainable thinking and action. He chairs the Produktionskollektiv associations in Vienna and Stuttgart and manages creative sustainability and energy transition initiatives at Theater RAMPE in Stuttgart. He is active throughout Europe as an expert for artistically motivated creative sustainability projects.

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Acknowledgements

Thank you, to the participants of the Youth Engagement Workshop. The youth of the Max-Planck Gymnasium for being wonderful tour guides for the members of the landscape democracy team and showed us how they use the bustling bus station on a daily basis, what they liked and what they didn't like about it. With your help, we not only understood what the bus station means to you, but we were also able to formulate the first proposals so that the bus station could be an attractive place for all youth in Nürtingen.

Landscape Forum 2023 Landscape Democracy Working Group Participants, who served as "tandem part-ners" to listen to the youth participants in the workshop. This includes Kamila Adamczyk, Noriko Akida, Ruba Al-Hamzi, Kai-Lukas Bentz, Caroline de Vries, Finja Graf, Laura Groeneveld, Sonja Hörster, Asfia Islam, Eleni Mougiakou, and Aiga Spage.

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Karl Michael Lange and Anna Szilágyi-Nagy for dreaming up, organising and conducting the Youth Engagement Workshop.

Landscape Forum 2023 Landscape Democracy Working Group Participants
give a warm thank you to all who made this possible.





Transitions at the bus station in Nürtingen
Photo: Internationale Bauausstellung 2027 StadtRegion Stuttgart

Methods from the Living Lab

Transferable tools used in the Nürtingen Living Lab to inspire your local lab

Tandem Walk + Chalk Drawings

Walking with locals to see spaces through their eyes





Figure 1: Chalk markings made by students to highlight aspects of a public space together. This particular area is tightly shared by bicycles, pedestrians entering a tunnel, causing accidents to passersby. Photo: Caroline de Vries Figure 2: After the exercise, students and tandem partners gather to share and map their findings with other groups. Photo: Karl Michael Lange

What is this, and what is it used for?

In this exercise, students walked with their tandem partners on their routes to school through the bus station. They marked areas in chalk where there were areas of danger or places they liked. This allows the designers or planners to see the area through the local youth's eyes. Additionally, the youth participants have an opportunity to share their experience of the area and influence local designs.

Authors

Facilitators & Developers: Anna Szilágyi-Nagy and Karl Michael Lange, based on the ideas of HfWU students, report written by Caroline de Vries

OLA

How is it done?

1. Tandem partners and youth participants walk together through the site area.
2. Youth participants show areas of their daily routes, while tandem partners listen and ask questions as they explore the area together.
3. At points of note - including perceptions of places that the participants like/dislike, etc. - the area is marked with chalk or a photo is taken.

Materials

- Chalk
- Paper for notes
- Phone/Camera for pictures

Prerequisites

Trust and friendly attitude to show the area together, and clear instructions from a group facilitator so each group knows the task and when to start/arrive back together.

Time required

1 hour (can be less or more depending on the project site area and number of people participating).

Number of people

- Group activity, can be done with 1 youth participant + 1 tandem partner, and can include as many groups as needed.
- In our case, our group had more fun and success when groups joined, aka 3 youth participants + 3 tandem partners. The youth participants were more comfortable and engaged when they were together with their friends instead of one-on-one.

PlayMobil Walk

Exploring places together through collective games and activities



Figure 1: A group walks a local landscape with their PlayMobil figures, taking notes together of landscape elements they perceive. Photo: Caroline de Vries



Figure 2: A PlayMobil figure by the Tiefenbach stream, marking a place of tranquility in a local residential area. Photo: Caroline de Vries

What is this, and what is it used for?

During this exercise, a large group was split into smaller working groups of 4-5 people. Each person chose a PlayMobil figure to represent them, and then each team explored the landscape site area together. When a person noticed a part of the area that caught their attention – either an area they liked, would like to improve, or had another quality they wanted to remember or emphasize – the team would take a picture of their PlayMobil figure in the area. This helped the team explore the landscape together through conversation and action.

This allowed the students to explore the site area together, in this case the Tiefenbach Valley, in small groups, and make observations with each other in a fun and interactive way.

Authors

Anna Szilágyi-Nagy and Karl Michael Lange, report written by Caroline de Vries

OLA

How is it done?

1. Introduce the activity and discuss the themes and goals.
2. Create small groups to explore together
3. Each group member chooses a PlayMobil figure to represent them, that they will take on their journey.
4. The groups then start their exploration of the landscape together.
5. When an area of note comes (either favorite area, area to improve, etc.), the team takes a photo of the PlayMobil figure(s) in the area.
6. They groups then reconnect, and record and explain what they found through a report, story, etc.

Materials

- PlayMobil figures
- Map of area to orient and take notes
- Camera/Phone to take pictures
- Pen/pencil to take notes

Prerequisites

- Activity leader to give clear instructions and timeframe so the students start/arrive back on time, and can understand the activity and some ideas of what to record

Time required

1-2 hours, depending on the size of the project area and the number of participants.

Number of people

- Ideally for groups - either pairs (2 people each) or small groups (3-6)
- Can have as many groups as needed.
- Can also be done individually, but groups are more interactive and fun

PlayMobil Tiny Protest

PlayMobil figures giving voice to local actions



Figure 1: Two figures represent examples of local advocacy. Photo: Aige Spage



Figure 2: A PlayMobil figures lined up before the workshop session. Photo: Aige Spage

What is this, and what is it used for?

This method uses playfulness to address landscape challenges to promote communication and advocacy. In this case, passersby are welcome to add their voice anonymously in an interactive format. The PlayMobil characters are utilized to help state an idea or desire for the future design of a place. Each participant is invited to:

1) Decide a main wish for the future of the bus station or a comment about its current state.
2) Choose a Playmobil figure to represent them and state this idea/desire.

They then wrote their wish or comment on a small sign so it could be held by a Playmobil figure, who would hold up their wish or comment for them.

Authors

Anna Szilágyi-Nagy and Karl Michael Lange, report written by Caroline de Vries

OLA

How is it done?

1. Set up a table with all materials.
2. Participants (groups or passersbys) are invited to choose a PlayMobil figure
3. Participants write their message or wish on the sign
4. Place the PlayMobil figure on the map or table with the sign as part of the "Tiny Protest"
5. Optional: Share your character and its sign in a group

Materials

- PlayMobil figures (Ideally with diverse representation)
- Small signs for the PlayMobil figures (materials below can be placed out and participants can make their own signs if everything is ready - makes it easier to write on the signs if not yet assembled)
    - Small sticks (small enough to fit in PlayMobil figure hands - around 7cm long)
    - Small pieces of paper
    - Tape
- Sticky Tack (Klebeknete) - can be used to help keep the figures upright on tables or to keep the signs in the PlayMobil figures' hands
- Pens/Markers

Prerequisites

Activity leaders to give clear instructions and support

Time required

5-10 minutes for each participant to complete a sign, though the activity can be ongoing for 1-2 hours

Number of people

Unlimited. Can be a single person protest or have as many participants as desired.

Mapping the Way

Collecting landscape observations collaboratively

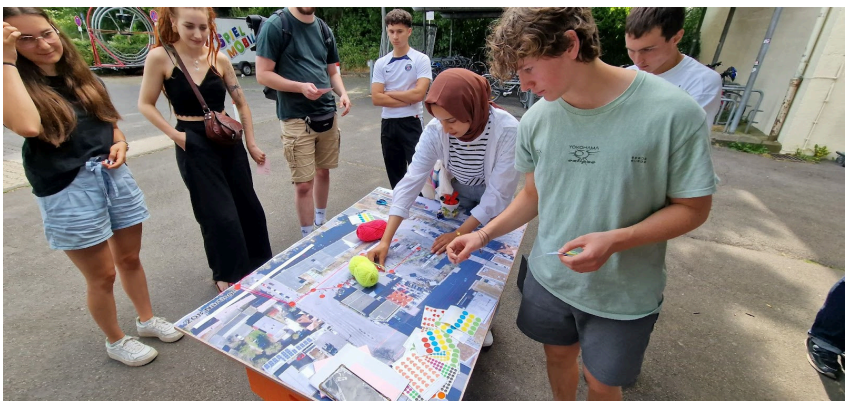


Figure 1: Mapping landscape observations, including routes, challenges, and places of interest together in a collaborative format. Photo: Karl Michael Lange

What is this, and what is it used for?

After the exploring a landscape in small groups, students recorded their observations of the area to form a collaborate map. For example, they marked their paths with yarn on a map of the area. Students also noted areas that they liked or considered dangerous with notes and circular stickers. Together, the map shows a collective view of the project site that includes multiple perspectives. This can be used to enhance the planning of the area with the inclusion of local knowledge.

Authors

Anna Szilágyi-Nagy and Karl Michael Lange, report written by Caroline de Vries

OLA

How is it done?

1. Materials laid out (map, markers, sticky dots, scissors, etc.)
2. Participants mark the map, noting the paths they walk with the yarn, and making notes with the post-its and sticky dots and/or any other materials.
3. Activity continues until each participant/group marks the map as they see fit

Materials

- Printed map of area (preferably size A1+)
- Circular stickers (Klebepunkte)
- Yarn
- Post-its for notes
- Markers
- Scissors

Prerequisites

It is helpful to do the tandem walk + chalk drawing activity together (or a similar activity) before this activity to brainstorm ideas and have more concrete ideas and physical reminder of the area

Time required

20-45 minutes+ depending how much detail is added, discussion time, size of group

Number of people

Group project, available for as many participants as needed. Larger groups may just want to print out a larger map so there is enough room for people to work and lay out their markings.

Getting to Know Each Other

Icebreaker activity to form pairs and teams





Figure 1: Teambuilding exercises to bring groups together. Photo: Karl Michael Lange

What is this, and what is it used for?

Students and facilitators team up for a group activity to find their tandem partners for the rest of the day's activities. In one line, the facilitators stand, and in the other, the youth participants (however this can be adapted for any types of different groups coming together).

Groups stand opposite each other, hold out their arms, and walk towards each other. They find their partners across from them, and start to talk to each other (at this point guided prompts can be given, or chatting can be done spontaneously).

Authors

Anna Szilágyi-Nagy and Karl Michael Lange, report written by Caroline de Vries

OLA

How is it done?

1. Both groups stand in a line facing each other (in this case it was the Forum facilitators and the youth participants)
2. Both groups start to walk towards each other, holding out their arms, finding their partners on the other side

Materials

- Group of Participants
- Team leader to guide with instructions
- Space to move

Prerequisites

None

Time required

5-10 minutes

Number of people

Interactive group activity, ideally for groups larger than 5 people.



Collaborative mapping with youth participants at the bus station
Photo: Karl Michael Lange



Using storytelling games to foster new relationships with nature indoors and outdoors. *Photo: Eszter Jákli*

Vác, Hungary

OLA Living Lab



Children explore their landscape
Photo credit: Gyula Csernok

As landscapes shift and cities grow—how can communities ensure children still find nature, wonder, and freedom outdoors?

The Child-friendly Vác Living Lab reconnects children with nature in Vác, Hungary, through participatory urban planning and community-driven landscape transformation. Focusing on underused green spaces like Alsó-Törökhegy Forest, the project empowers youth to shape inclusive, sustainable environments, fostering outdoor play, well-being, and stronger community ties amidst urban change.

Authors: Eszter Tóth, Anna Szilágyi-Nagy, István Valánszki, Zsófia Földi, Zsombor Boromisza, Tayana Passos Rosa

OLA

Vác, Hungary

OLA Living Lab

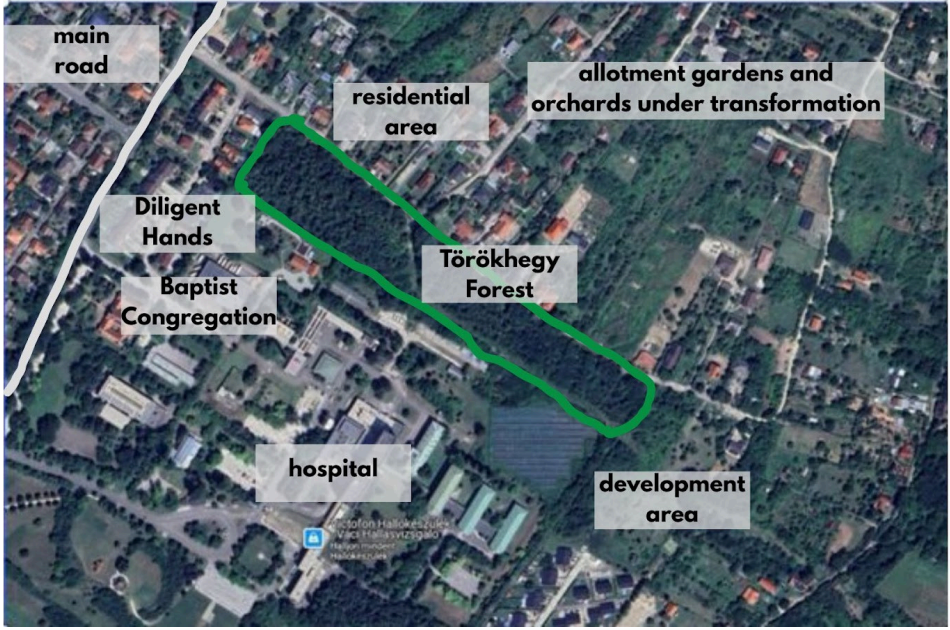
Landscape Context

Vác, known as the southern gateway of the Danube Bend, lies on the left bank of the Danube at the foot of Naszály Mountain, about 20 km north of Budapest. Covering 61.5 km² with 34,040 residents, the city uniquely combines urban infrastructure with a rich natural environment, making it an ideal testing ground for innovative child-friendly designs in the Budapest Agglomeration.

The alienation of children from nature, a global phenomenon, is particularly challenging in Vác due to the radical transformation of the landscape. Previously green spaces where children could experience authentic nature (e.g., orchards) have been built over, or transformed (e.g., the large playground along the Danube).

Our Living Lab initially examined the city's entire network of green spaces and, as detailed in our process diary, gradually focused on the Törökhegy forest. Originally developed in the 1970s as a protective barrier at the city's edge to shield the hospital from mine-related air pollution, the Törökhegy forest has been absorbed into the urban fabric due to rapid growth and urbanization, yet it remains underused and inaccessible. This is especially concerning in Vác's youngest district, where many families with small children lack adequate public spaces and quality nature experiences.

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The Törökhegy Forest. Image Source: Google Maps

Community Map

Community Map of Democratic Transformation of Nature-Experience Spaces for Youth in Vác

The Alsó-Törökhegy Forest emerged as a priority site for participatory development due to its potential to improve children's access to nature. Through fieldwork, interviews, and community events, we mapped key stakeholders—from the municipality and local children and families, to local activists organizing outreach events, to the neighbouring hospital and the Diligent Hands House (Szorgos Kezek) supporting youth with disabilities, as well as current informal users and nearby schools and kindergartens interested in outdoor learning. During the community mapping it became clear that the forest's present conditions and future visions are shaped not only by diverse human actors but also by natural elements and broader discourses such as environmental conservation, safety, and urban planning. By conducting a situational analysis that extends traditional community mapping to include relationships between human and non-human actors, we were able to identify power dynamics, competing interests, and material conditions that influence the landscape, ensuring our development plans remain responsive to both social and ecological realities (Figure 2).

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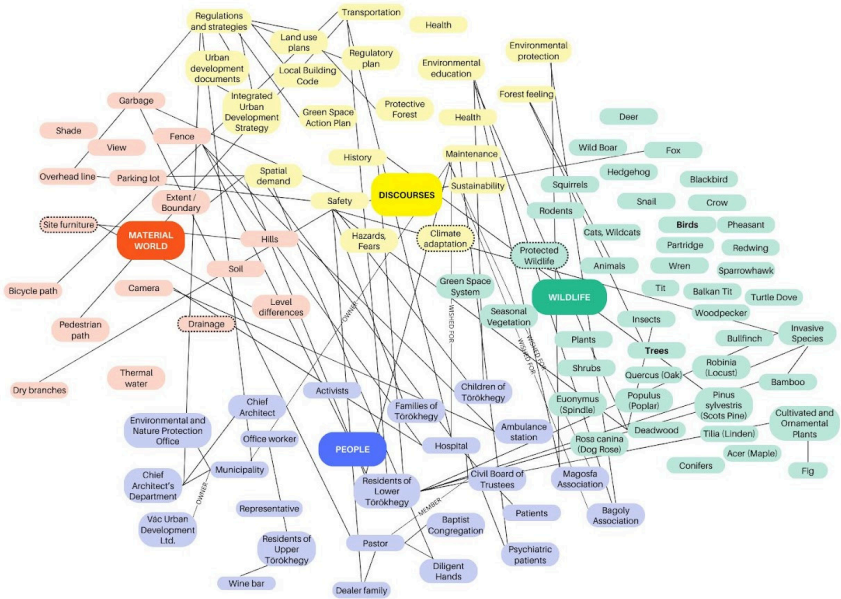


Figure 2: Situational Analysis of the Törökhegy Forest (by Eszter Tóth on the basis of Adele Clarke)

Power Map

Power Map of Alsó-Törökhegy: Understanding Power Relations and Shared Interests

Alsó-Törökhegy is a neighborhood in transition, shifting from orchard land to residential use, understanding the power relations between various groups is crucial. By synthesizing the visual representation of the communities surrounding the forest (Figure 1) with the situational analysis (Figure 2), a set of power relations becomes apparent. The municipality, as the forest owner and urban authority, initiates development and supports participatory planning, but is constrained by limited resources and the impact of past parceling mistakes. Local activists and community members are advocating for the forest as a shared space, with some council support aiding their engagement and fundraising efforts.

Residents are divided between the wealthier families in the lower part, who are less reliant on the forest due to private gardens, and the more isolated upper part, where missing roads make shared public spaces vital. Commuters and informal users of the forest, such as those seeking temporary refuge or disposing of waste, present unique challenges and safety concerns that need to be addressed while also recognizing their needs.

Despite their differences, the stakeholders in Alsó-Törökhegy share key goals, such as transforming the forest into a community hub and improving accessibility with cost-effective interventions. Engaging local companies in funding restorative efforts presents an opportunity to address environmental impacts while fostering community development. It is essential to balance the needs of current and future forest users, with a particular focus on creating a child-friendly environment.

The future of Alsó-Törökhegy hinges on strengthening local ties beyond digital platforms, organizing participatory events to cultivate trust, and introducing small-scale improvements that can make a significant impact. The pursuit of funding from municipal and private sources is critical to achieving these goals and fostering an inclusive public space that serves the community's needs and preserves the forest's ecological role.

Values

The local living lab in Alsó-Törökhegy is guided by the core values of the Charta for Democratic Landscape Transformation: openness, inclusiveness, participation, empathy, sustainability, and resilience. These values are manifested in the Vác Living Lab, where openness is demonstrated through a willingness to consider all opinions and adapt goals based on the locals' real needs related to nature. Inclusiveness focuses on children and young adults, with special tools developed to involve them effectively, while also considering the perspectives of other age groups. Participation is encouraged through various opportunities for local youth to actively participate in shaping their environment. Empathy is central to the project, ensuring an understanding of different viewpoints. Sustainability is addressed by creating open spaces with minimal interventions and raising awareness of natural areas' importance. Lastly, resilience is built by enhancing the quantity and quality of green spaces, making municipalities more robust against current and future challenges.

OLA

Research Questions

As Vác grows, urban densification is shrinking children's access to nature. Once free to explore their neighborhoods, children now face structured schedules, increased car use, and safety concerns that limit unstructured outdoor play—impacting their cognitive, emotional, and physical development. Our research aimed to understand how this global trend manifests locally and how urban spaces can foster richer nature experiences.

Mapping children's outdoor activities revealed a clear disconnect: while they prefer playing in nature, their opportunities are increasingly restricted. Play is concentrated in a few well-known sites, like the Danube riverside and playgrounds, while many smaller green spaces remain overlooked. Parental concerns over safety and convenience reinforce this shift, limiting children's independence and spontaneous outdoor play.

This led to our central research question: **How can community-driven initiatives enhance nature experiences for children within the context of a rapidly transforming landscape and changing social environment?**

More specifically, we explored two key sub-questions:

1. **How can small, informal urban green spaces be optimized through co-creation with children to provide meaningful nature experiences?**
2. **How can the abandoned forest of Törökhegy be transformed into a meaningful nature space through community collaboration?**

Process Diary

As stated above, the guiding research question of our project was: *How can community-driven initiatives enhance nature experiences for children within the context of a rapidly transforming landscape and changing social environment?* We chose Vác as our local context, aiming to explore this question through an open and iterative research process. Rather than following a rigid framework, the project evolved dynamically, shaped by community input that not only enriched our understanding but also influenced the research trajectory itself.

The process unfolded in four main phases, as shown in Figure 3. The first focused on understanding the local landscape challenges, identifying existing barriers and opportunities. This was followed by an in-depth exploration of children's nature experiences in Vác. The third phase centered on co-creating nature experience spaces with the community, translating insights into tangible interventions. Finally, a retrospective reflection and analysis allowed us to distill key learnings, ensuring that the knowledge generated could contribute to broader discussions on child-friendly urban development and democratic landscape transformation.

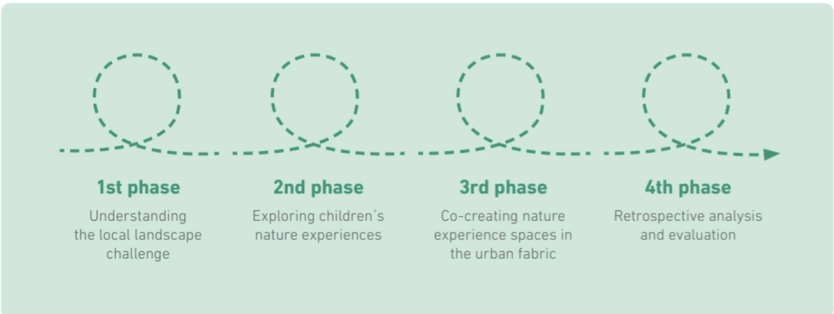


Figure 3: Four phases of the research project. Source: Tóth, E., Szilágyi-Nagy, A., Földi, Zs., Valánszky, (2025)

1st PHASE – UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE CHALLENGE

The first phase of our project focused on understanding the local landscape and its challenges. Before proposing any interventions, we needed to immerse ourselves in the spatial and social fabric of Vác, exploring how children interact with nature and what obstacles exist in ensuring meaningful experiences. This process was not just about analyzing physical spaces but also about understanding local perceptions, historical layers, and community structures that shape access to nature.

Kick-off brainstorming: engaging stakeholders and framing the challenge

To establish a foundation for community-driven research, we organized a Kick-Off Brainstorming Session to initiate a dialogue on the local landscape challenge. The meeting introduced the project to key stakeholders, gathered initial insights on existing challenges and opportunities, and explored ways in which participants could contribute through their expertise, resources, and networks, as visually recorded in Figure 4.

Held at the local government office, the session reinforced the project's relevance to municipal planning and public policy. The diverse group of participants – including the deputy mayor, a local bookstore, a community activist, an ecological foundation, and the town museum – ensured that multiple perspectives were represented. This exchange of perspectives challenged and refined our initial assumptions, broadening the project's scope and deepening its connection to the local context.



Figure 4: Visual record of the Kick-off brainstorming session at the Municipality Vác. Graphic by Hajnalka Izsák.

Tracing the past: oral histories of childhood and nature

Our overarching goal in this first phase was to understand the challenges surrounding children's nature experiences by examining how these interactions have evolved over space and time. To do so, we first investigated how children in Vác historically connected to nature, seeking to uncover past patterns of outdoor play and engagement with natural spaces.

We launched an Oral History Campaign, inviting local residents to share memories, photos, and stories about their childhood experiences in nature. The campaign was designed as an open call, with the goal of collecting diverse perspectives and ultimately curating an exhibition at the Vác Cultural Center. While the campaign provided valuable historical insights, it also revealed a key challenge: the need to build trust within the local community. Despite the university's long-standing partnership with the municipality, many residents were unfamiliar with the Living Lab partners, making engagement difficult. Open calls alone proved ineffective, highlighting the necessity of establishing relationships with key local actors who could facilitate outreach.

In parallel, MA Landscape Architecture students conducted narrative interviews with elderly residents, gathering personal recollections of outdoor play and nature interactions across generations. To deepen these insights, they carried out a historical photo analysis using local archives and digital resources, while a literature review helped contextualize the findings within broader socio-environmental transformations. Their findings were synthesized into exhibition posters (Figure 5).

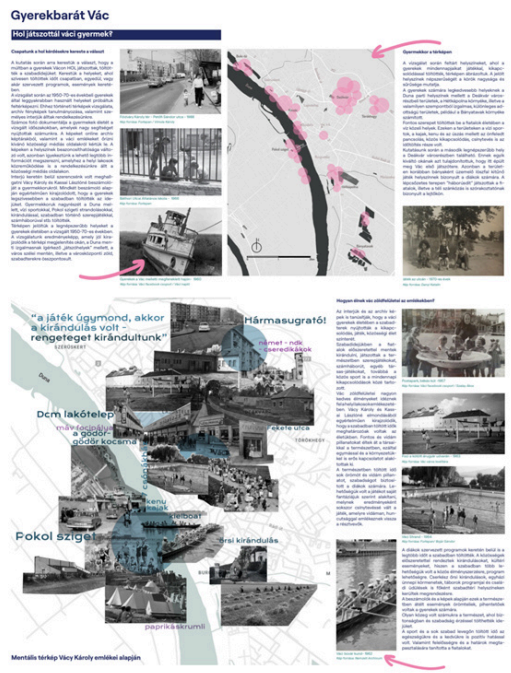


Figure 5: One student exhibition poster on children's outdoor play spaces in Vác in the past. Source: MATE students – MA in Landscape Architecture and Garden Design

Funded by the European Union

Understanding the present: children's contemporary nature experiences

Simultaneously, we explored how children in Vác engage with nature today. MA Landscape Architecture students conducted interviews and drawing exercises with children, capturing their perspectives on outdoor play and natural spaces. A parent survey complemented this data, providing family insights, while official databases helped map urban green spaces and child-friendly facilities. Their findings were synthesized into exhibition posters (Figure 6).

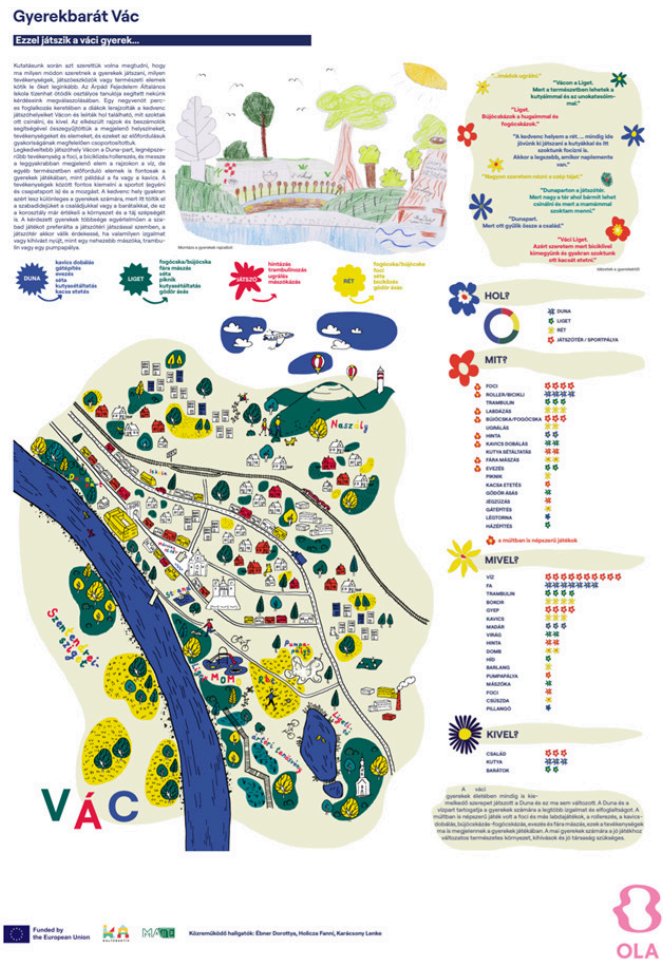


Figure 6: One student exhibition poster on children's outdoor play spaces in Vác in the past. Source:

From research to dialogue: public exhibition and community reflection

The findings from both historical and contemporary explorations were synthesized and presented at an exhibition at the Vác Cultural Center. This exhibition became an important moment in the project, offering a tangible and interactive way for the local community to engage with the evolving nature of childhood play. By visually contrasting past and present experiences, the exhibition sparked discussions on how the city's natural spaces could better support children's needs in the future. The event not only disseminated research results but also served as a bridge for deeper dialogue between different generations, policymakers, and community members, strengthening engagement in the ongoing process (see Figure 7).



Figure 7: Public exhibition at the Vác Community Center presenting the results of the first research phase for the community. Photo Source: Anna Szilágyi-Nagy

INSIGHTS FROM THE 1ST RESEARCH PHASE

Our initial research identified two significant shifts in how children in Vác experience nature today compared to previous generations.

1

Decline in Unstructured Nature Experiences

Historically, children spent much of their free time outdoors, engaging in unstructured play in natural settings. Their daily lives were intertwined with nearby forests, fields, and open landscapes, where they could explore freely. In contrast, contemporary children's interactions with nature have become more structured and episodic. Their time is increasingly shaped by institutional settings and organized activities, with nature experiences often limited to occasional weekend outings with parents.

2

Spatial Contraction of Outdoor Play

Whereas previous generations roamed across a wide range of informal green spaces - including the local quarry, forests, and the Danube island - today's outdoor play is largely confined to a few designated urban sites. The Danube riverside and the city's main playgrounds have become the primary spaces for children's outdoor activities, reflecting a broader trend of shrinking spatial autonomy and reduced access to diverse natural environments.

2nd PHASE – EXPLORING CHILDREN` S NATURE EXPERIENCES IN VÁC

The second phase of the research focused on two key objectives: strengthening trust with local actors to foster deeper community engagement and conducting an in-depth study on children's connection to nature in Vác. Building on the insights from the first phase, this stage involved both participatory activities with stakeholders and empirical research conducted in collaboration with BA Landscape Architecture students.

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Mid-project partner engagement workshop

Following the data collection and community exhibition, we organized a workshop on Reflective Childhood Memories for Visioning Future Landscapes (see Figure 8). The goal was to deepen partner engagement by encouraging participants to reflect on their own childhood nature experiences and use these insights to shape a shared vision for the future.

Using Dixit cards as prompts, participants recalled personal memories of playing in nature, sharing their experiences in an open, collaborative setting. This exercise provided a valuable shift in perspective, as it moved beyond abstract discussions about urban planning and grounded the conversation in personal, emotional connections to nature. After the reflection phase, participants were guided to envision the future – imagining how today's children might experience nature in Vác and what role they, as stakeholders, could play in shaping those opportunities.

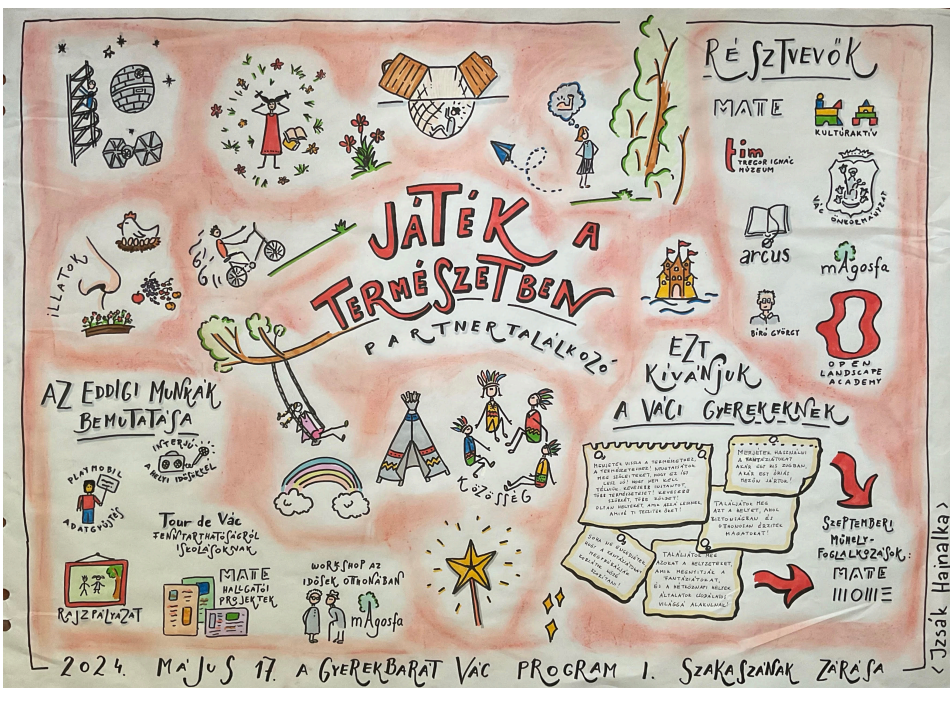


Figure 8. Visual record of the Mid-project partner engagement workshop. Graphic: Hajnalka Izsák

Exploring children's connection to nature: fieldwork with BA landscape architecture students

Children's engagement with nature is influenced by family narratives, peer interactions, education, and urban design, requiring a multi-layered analytical perspective. To capture these complexities, we employed a triangulated research method, integrating perspectives from children, parents, and experts (see Table 1 and Figures 9–10). Under the supervision of the research team, BA landscape architecture students conducted mixed-method data collection during an intensive fieldwork week, analyzing both barriers and opportunities for improving children's access to nature. Beyond generating valuable insights, this collaborative process provided students with hands-on experience in participatory methodologies and child-friendly urban planning, reinforcing the role of co-creation in landscape architecture education.

	PARTICIPANT GROUPS	METHODOLOGY	DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS
CHILDREN · 25 particpants · aged 11–12 · one 5th-grade class	Children, as primary users of urban green spaces, provide direct insight into their perception, engagement, and navigation of nature in daily life.	**NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS** Captured children's lived experiences and emotional connections to nature, ensuring open-ended expression	Facilitators used storytelling to prompt children's nature memories, expressed through stories, drawings, or clay modeling. Landscape architecture students documented and analyzed responses for themes on place, actions, interactions, and natural elements.
PARENTS · 58 participants · parents or grandparents of children aged 7–14, distinct from the study participants	Parents and grandparents shape children's nature experiences through decisions on play locations and permitted interactions with natural spaces. **EDUCATION:** University **34** High School **14** PhD **6** Vocational school **2** Primary School **2** **AGE:** 40-49 years **29** 30-39 years **15** 50-59 years **6** 60-69 years **5** 70 or over **3**	**STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE** Systematically captured parental attitudes, green space access, and barriers to children's independent play, revealing patterns in decision-making and its impact on nature experiences.	To examine adult influence on children's nature access, we surveyed 120 parents, analyzing 58 responses from local residents with children aged 7–14. Data was gathered through public interactions, online surveys, and community events, covering demographics, play habits, generational comparisons, and parental attitudes.
EXPERTS · 20 participants · BA landscape architecture students participants	Experts offer an analytical perspective on green spaces, assessing accessibility, quality, and design features that shape nature engagement.	**CADASTRAL SURVEY** Assessed the availability, quality, and usability of nature spaces in Vác, highlighting structural and design factors shaping children's access and interaction. This approach bridged experiential perspectives with the physical realities of the urban landscape.	Students surveyed all green spaces over 4×4 meters, evaluating accessibility, safety, maintenance, biodiversity, and play value. They analyzed usage and improvement potential, comparing findings with the city's green infrastructure map to identify informal, underutilized spaces.

Table 1. Mixed-method data collection framework for exploring children's connection to nature in Vác. Tóth, E., Szilágyi-Nagy, A., Földi, Zs., Valánszky, I. (2025):



Figure 9. Children's representations of recent nature experiences through drawings. Photos: Hanna Sántha



Figure 10. Excerpt from the cadastral survey: mapping and documentation of green spaces in Southern Vác. The map highlights green spaces identified by students, with accompanying photographs illustrating two specific sites – B3 and B7. Photos: Dóra Nagyová, Nóra Kosztolányi, Henrietta Szabó Al'Quairah, Hanna Sántha

Exploring the landscape challenge at the forest in Törökhegy

As trust within the community grew, new opportunities emerged. The Chief Architect of Vác, recognizing the value of the project, initiated discussions on the potential development of green spaces, suggesting the Törökhegy Forest as a site for intervention (Figure 11 – 12). This introduced a new direction: the possibility of transforming a larger-scale natural site into a meaningful nature experience space for children and the wider community.

To better understand the ecological and social landscape of this area, we engaged seven BA students in an intensive exploration of the site (Figure 13). Their work included narrative interviews with key local stakeholders, surveys, and community engagement activities, such as street actions and a community picnic.



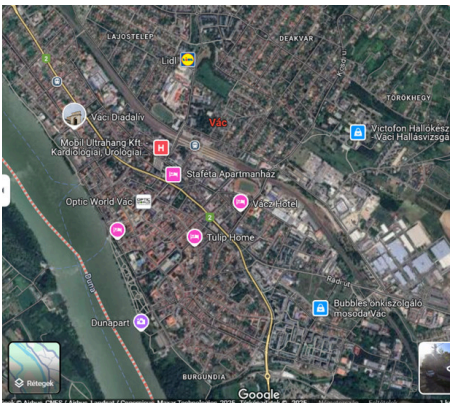


Figure 11 (left): Desolate condition of the forest strip. Photo Source: BSc in Landscape Management and Garden Construction Engineering. Figure 12 (right): Forest strip at the Törökhegy in Vác. Source: Google Maps



Figure 13. Student's community activities at the Törökhegy. Photo Source: BSc in Landscape Management and Garden Construction Engineering

INSIGHTS FROM THE 2ND RESEARCH PHASE

The first phase provided in-depth insights into both children's connection to nature and the community's perspectives on the Törökhegy Forest, shaping the direction of the next steps.

Our research on children's nature experiences confirmed that while children strongly prefer unstructured, nature-based play, their actual opportunities are increasingly restricted due to parental concerns, urbanization, and a lack of accessible informal green spaces. The findings underscored the importance of small, everyday nature interactions and led us to focus on co-developing informal green spaces with children as an actionable intervention.

Simultaneously, our engagement with the community around the Törökhegy Forest revealed both interest and hesitation. While residents and institutional actors recognized the forest's potential as a nature experience site, negative perceptions - including safety concerns, unfamiliarity, and ecological degradation - posed barriers to its use. A deeper analysis and engagement with the local community and the forest was needed.

3rd PHASE – CO-CREATING NATURE EXPERIENCE SPACES

The third phase of the project focuses on actively transforming nature spaces through participatory interventions. Moving beyond research and analysis, this stage engaged children, students, and the local community in hands-on design, storytelling, and community-building activities. The goal was twofold: to develop small-scale informal green spaces with children and co-create a vision and a plan for the Törökhegy Forest.

Reimagining Everyday School Environments as Play Biotopes with Children

In collaboration with a 5th-grade class, MA Landscape Architecture students reimagined the everyday spaces around a school—such as the schoolyard, the area in front of the building, and the path leading to the nearby Danube riverside playground—as potential nature experience spaces. Rather than transforming informal green spaces, the project focused on how to highlight and activate children's connection to nature through play within their immediate school environment. The process centered on child-led walks, discussions, and evaluations of nature experiences to better understand how children perceive, value, and engage with urban nature (Figure 14). While no physical alterations were made to the landscape, the final session involved co-developing nature-based play scenarios in front of the school, using existing natural elements and spatial features to explore how everyday settings can function as play biotopes led by children's perspectives.



Figure 14. Seeing Nature Through Children's Eyes. Photos: MATE students - MA in Landscape Architecture and Garden Design

Situational analysis of the forest strip at Törökhegy

MA Landscape Architecture students implement a situational analysis of the Törökhegy Forest strip, expanding beyond traditional stakeholder mapping by incorporating non-human elements such as soil conditions, vegetation patterns, and material traces that shape the forest's affordances and limitations.

The aim was to understand the complex dynamics influencing the transformation of the forest into a child-friendly space. By integrating spatial observations, interviews, and community feedback, the analysis provided the comprehensive foundation for the first plan for the Törökhegy Forest as a nature experience space (Figure 15).

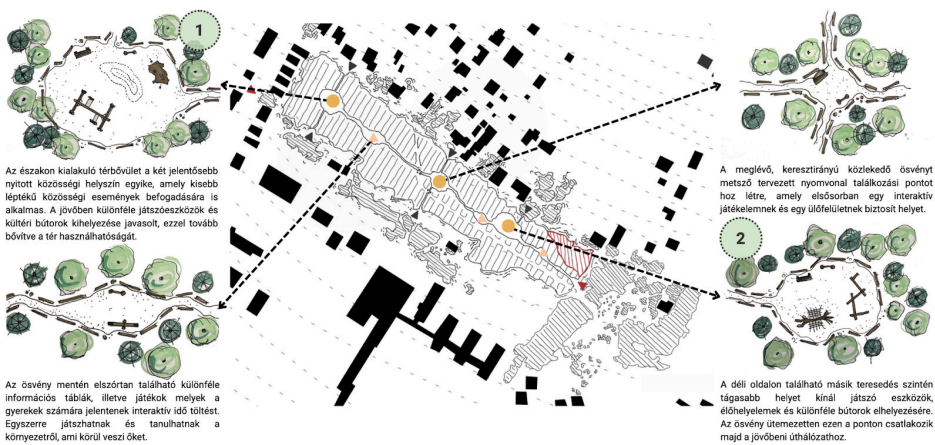


Figure 15. MA student proposals informed by the situational analysis of the Törökhegy Forest. Poster credits: Anna Luca Mohácsi , Péter Müller, Andrea Orbán, Kriszta Anna Sándor, Simon Péter, István Ferdinándy

Breaking barriers of fear through fairy tales

One of the key challenges identified in the earlier phase was the negative perception of the forest among local residents, including safety concerns, unfamiliarity, and ecological degradation. To address this, MA students in an environmental education course worked on a storytelling intervention aimed at shifting public attitudes toward urban forests. They collected and wrote fairy tales inspired by urban nature, incorporating themes that reframe the forest as a space of wonder, curiosity, and belonging rather than fear and avoidance. These stories were shared with local children through interactive sessions held both in classrooms and in nearby forested areas, using narrative as a medium to reshape how children engage with and perceive urban nature spaces (Figure 16).







Figure 16. Using storytelling games to foster new relationships with nature indoors and outdoors
Photo credits: Anna Szilágyi-Nagy, Eszter Jákli

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Playful community engagement with the forest strip

To support a deeper understanding of how children and families relate to Törökhegy Forest, BA Landscape Architecture students developed two interactive games encouraging nature-based play and reflection. One was a board game simulating a joyful afternoon with friends in the forest, highlighting favorite activities and social interactions. The other was a story-driven discovery game in which children followed a space-themed adventure, exploring the forest, observing its elements, and completing playful tasks such as building a house for a space-hedgehog (Figure 17).

These games were implemented during a practice week course, inviting participants to engage with the forest in new ways, to express what they value in the space, and to discover its qualities through direct experience. The process offers valuable insights for planners by illustrating how children experience and imagine nature, while also providing children and families with opportunities for joyful, meaningful engagement with the forest.







Figure 17. The space story comes to life in the forest as children draw cards, explore the landscape, complete challenges, and collect spaceship parts to launch from the planet
Photo credit: Gyula Csernok



Figure 17. The space story comes to life in the forest as children draw cards, explore the landscape, complete challenges, and collect spaceship parts to launch from the planet Photo credit: Gyula Csernok

Community event: making friends with the forest

The two-week-long practice period concluded with a community event designed to strengthen emotional and social connections to the forest. Neighboring families were invited to a storytelling and planning occasion, where they listened to forest tales in the newly created clearing, then explored the freshly shaped hills, paths, clearings, and hidden nooks of the forest through games developed by BA Landscape Architecture students. These playful activities encouraged discovery and engagement with nature, while families were also invited to share their ideas and reflections, offering perspectives on how the forest could be experienced and imagined in the future (Figure 18).





Figure 18. Moments from the Story-based Forest Planning Afternoon. Photo source: Gyula Csernok

Impact of the Living Lab

The Vác Living Lab made a significant impact on multiple levels. At the urban landscape level, the project contributed to transforming Vác into a more child-friendly city through co-created green spaces that enhance everyday urban life. In the Törökhegy community, the initiative fostered a renewed dialogue about shared spaces, strengthening local bonds and community engagement. Children involved in the project not only enjoyed enriched nature experiences but also learned about environmental stewardship and the value of co-creation. Meanwhile, students gained practical competencies in participatory methodologies and child-friendly urban planning, reinforcing the importance of hands-on, interdisciplinary learning. Lastly, the project spurred growth among living lab partners, deepening collaborative networks that promise sustained impact on their transdisciplinary research and future living lab initiatives.

Reflection: Failures and Success Factors

The launch of the project was complicated by our desire to initiate with a program that required significant community involvement, yet we had not established the community network. We did not know whom to address, leading to the failure of the initial step as there was minimal participation in the startup program. Building trust with the locals was a slower process than we anticipated. After we gained the trust of the locals, from that point on, we received opportunities that truly have a significant impact on the community's life. The subject of our project proved to be very relevant in Vác, and the involved stakeholders feel a sense of ownership and provide their support. The local community actively participates in the programs. A network of relationships has been formed and is continuously developing, enabling us to reach out to and involve more stakeholders.

Transferable Approaches from this Living Lab

Our approach is guided by playfulness, inclusivity, and community-driven exploration, ensuring diverse voices contribute to shaping child-friendly nature spaces. We employ a blend of qualitative and participatory methods that foster intergenerational engagement and collaboration among stakeholders. Key tools include **situational analysis** to make sense of complex landscape situations; **children-led walks** that empower young participants to document and reflect on their nature experiences; **nature frames**, a creative technique to unveil and document urban green; and **nature memory reflection**, which harnesses storytelling with Dixit cards to envision future nature experiences.

Outlook and Next Steps

Perspective into the onward journey of the Living Lab

The Törökhegy Forest initiative is envisioned as a long-term, evolving project, where community engagement and ecological considerations continue shaping its transformation into a child-friendly natural play space. With MATE's presence in Vác, the Living Lab remains committed to fostering sustained collaborations between local stakeholders, students, and municipal actors.





Figure 19. Moments from the Story-based Forest Planning Afternoon. Photo source: Gyula Csernok.

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Figure 20. Moments from the Story-based Forest Planning Afternoon. Photo source: Gyula Csernok.

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Methods from the Living Lab

Transferable tools used in the Vác Living Lab to inspire your local lab

Situational Analysis

Understanding complex social situations

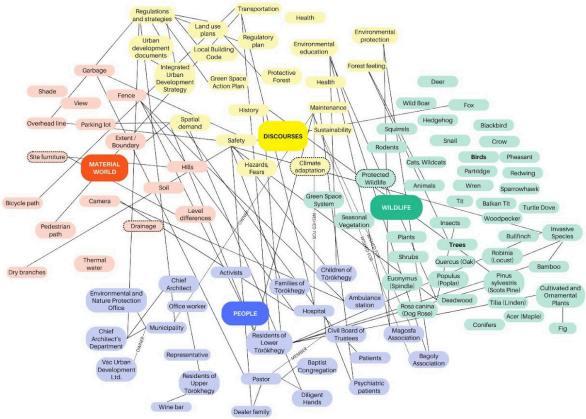


Figure 1: An example of a diagram representing complex relations in regards to wildlife, people, discourses, and the material world. Source: Eszter Tóth

What is this, and what is it used for?

Situational Analysis is a qualitative research method used as an analytical and reflective tool for understanding complex social situations—such as landscapes. It unveils complexities by integrating multiple perspectives along with people, social groups, and natural, material, and discursive elements that influence landscapes.

This method supports the democratic transformation of environments by revealing hidden interactions and tensions. By clarifying power relations and identifying missing voices, it guides inclusive decision-making processes toward more equitable and sustainable outcomes.

Authors

Eszter Tóth on the bases of Adele Clark

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How is it done?

1. Collect data: Observe how people use the landscape, take photos, note ecological features (e.g., vegetation, wildlife), and identify key policies or regulations. Interview residents, stakeholders, and experts to capture diverse views.
2. Map key actors, physical elements, and discourses:
    a. People (Which individuals and groups use the forest? How are different communities or stakeholders connected, and what interests/conflicts exist?
    b. Wildlife (Which plants, animals, and other ecological features are present?)
    c. Inanimate Elements (What natural and man-made structures (e.g., infrastructure, physical barriers) affect quality and development? How do these elements enable or constrain activities?)
    d. Discursive Context (Which legal or regulatory frameworks govern usage and transformation? What cultural narratives and social discourses shape perceptions or behaviors – e.g., safety, conservation?)
3. Draw connections: Depict interactions, alliances, conflicts, and gaps among actors and elements.
4. Reflect and update: Notice emerging patterns; adjust your map as you gather new insights.
5. Summarize findings: Create a concise visualization of relationships, guiding democratic interventions.

Materials

- Large paper/whiteboard, markers, sticky notes, digital mapping software (optional), data collection tools.

Prerequisites

Ideally, data collection and iterative mapping take place over several days or weeks, allowing for thorough exploration. However, this method can also be condensed into a 1–2 hour reflective session if sufficient information and contextual knowledge is already available.

Time required

5–10 minutes

Number of people

Best done in groups of 3–6.

Nature Memory Reflection

Preserve or recreate encounters for today's youth



Figure 1: A group discussing childhood memories to inspire future designs.



Figure 2: Illustration of childhood landscape memories.

What is this, and what is it used for?

This practice helps adults recall their own childhood memories and identify the core of meaningful nature experiences. By reflecting on what made these experiences possible, participants gain insights into how to preserve or recreate these encounters for today's youth. They then formulate wishes and actions aimed at supporting children's connections with nature.

Authors

Anna Szilágyi-Nagy

How is it done?

1. Lay out Dixit (or other illustrative) cards on a table.
2. Ask each participant to choose one or more cards reflecting a cherished childhood moment in nature.
3. Have them share their story, guided by:
    a. Where did it happen?
    b. What happened there?
    c. What feelings did you have?
4. Ask participants to identify what aspects of the environment made these experiences possible, note them on Post-its, and discuss how this compares with children's lives today.
5. Conclude by having each participant formulate a wish for local children ("I wish for you, children of ___, that…") and write one concrete action on the back of the card to help make that wish come true.

Materials

- Dixit or similar image cards
- Sticky notes (Post-its)
- Pencils

Prerequisites

- A friendly, comfortable atmosphere for sharing personal memories
- Willingness to reflect on childhood experiences

Time required

About 2 hours (depending on group size)

Number of people

Suitable for small or medium-sized groups, ensuring everyone has time to share.

Nature Frames

Engaging children in evaluating outdoor spaces



Figure 1: Student participants framing images from their local environments.

What is this, and what is it used for?

This method engages children in evaluating outdoor spaces by framing positive and negative aspects of nature using color-coded frames. They highlight liked or disliked elements, sparking discussions about nature's presence, quality, and potential improvements. Playful strategies, movement games, and embodied actions further enrich the process. Capturing these insights through photos and notes supports child-centered design, ensuring urban nature experiences reflect children's perspectives.

Authors

Anna Szilágyi-Nagy

How is it done?

1. Provide each child with a double-sided frame (green for "liked," red for "disliked"). Prepare small take-away kits with simple materials (e.g., post-its, paper, scissors, ropes) for marking or illustrating possible changes.
2. Visit the chosen location or walking route. Give children time to observe, then ask them to select places they appreciate or wish to improve. To boost engagement, introduce a playful countdown (e.g., "3-2-1, go!") where children race to highlight their chosen spots by placing their frames.
3. As children explain their choices—whether related to plants, safety, or missing natural elements—photograph the framed spots. Facilitators capture themes, spontaneous reactions, and emotional responses.
4. After documenting the current state, encourage children to explore how they would play and interact with nature. They may start engaging with loose parts—breaking stones, observing bugs on walls, or listening to birds. Invite them to act out how they would improve nature-connection using the space, forming "new trees" with their bodies, illustrating play ideas, or testing experiences like hiding behind a bush or playing hide-and-seek from passing cars. Frame these moments as well.
5. Photograph and document all framed or flagged elements. Note or record children's verbal and physical suggestions for further analysis. These insights inform child-centered planning and design, ensuring urban nature experiences reflect authentic perspectives.

Materials

- Double-sided color-coded frames (green/red)
- Small flags, papers, or other props for marking ideas
- Notebook or device for documenting notes/photos

Prerequisites

- Safe, accessible outdoor or semi-outdoor space
- Willingness of children to explore, discuss, and demonstrate
- Facilitators comfortable with guiding observation and playful activities

Time required

Approximately 1–2 hours, depending on area size and group dynamics

Number of people

- Works with varied group sizes
- Recommended ratio: about five children per adult facilitator for guidance

Children as Nature Guides & Mappers

Engaging children in evaluating outdoor spaces



Figure 1: Walking through familiar routes and seeing through others' eyes.

What is this, and what is it used for?

This method invites children to identify local natural spots they use and value in daily life. Organized into small subgroups, children guide adults on walks through their favorite sites, explaining—and demonstrating—how they engage with nature there. Afterward, everyone collaboratively creates a "memory map," documenting where these experiences occurred and why they are meaningful. By observing children's actual play and exploration, planners and educators learn how these places support vital connections with nature, even if the surroundings seem minimal or less "wild."

Authors

Anna Szilágyi-Nagy

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How is it done?

1. Divide children into small teams (e.g., five per group), each with one or two adult facilitators—one to guide conversation, the other to document the route (photos, notes).
2. In a classroom or gathering place, children choose which nature spots to visit, then lead adults there.
3. Encourage children to show how they play, explore, or otherwise interact with the environment. Adults take notes or photos, capturing the children's words and behaviors, especially how they make use of even minimal natural elements.
4. After the walk, everyone reconvenes to build a shared "memory map." Children and adults mark locations and add drawings or descriptors representing each experience.
5. Reflect as a group on why these spaces are meaningful and brainstorm potential improvements. The collective map and observations serve as a basis for understanding children's relationships with nature.

Materials

- Simple city or neighborhood map
- Markers, sticky notes, rope/string, or other creative supplies for mapping
- Camera or phone for photos
- Notebooks or diaries for logging observations

Prerequisites

- Safe, accessible local spaces
- Willingness of children to act as guides
- Clear facilitation roles (conversation leader and note-taker/photographer)

Time required

1–2 hours (or more, depending on distances and number of sites)

Number of people

- Flexible for different group sizes (small or large)
- Recommended ratio: about five children per one or two adults



Children explore their landscape through games and stories.
Photo: Gyula Csernok



The Solidarity Landscape Living Lab, photo of Villaggio Solidale and the town of Lurano, Italy. *Photo: Patrick Boyle*

Villaggio Solidale, Italy

OLA Living Lab



The Solidarity Landscape Living Lab, photo of Villaggio Solidale and the town of Lurano, Italy. Photo: Patrick Boyle

How does a Solidarity Living Lab model promote landscape democracy through participatory design processes involving academic institutions, social cooperatives, and local communities?

The Solidarity Living Lab is a collaboration between landscape architecture students and faculty from the University of Maryland and Consorzio FA, a social cooperative in Northern Italy's Bergamo region. Over three years, the design team and local partners co-created the Tarantasio Trail and a "social" master plan for an extended agro-ecology and solidarity-oriented landscape district where farmers, social cooperatives, and residents would participate in stewarding and changing their landscape to reflect their shared values and ambitions.

Authors: Deni Ruggeri, Ph.D. MLA, MRP and Mary Christensen, MLA

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Villaggio Solidale
Lurano, Italy
OLA Living Lab

Landscape Context

Since 2022, a team of Landscape Architecture students and faculty from the University of Maryland have worked in partnership with Consorzio FA on a Participatory Action Research project to outline a vision for a landscape physically, collaboratively, and conceptually linking two charitable co-housing communities operated by Consorzio FA in neighboring towns: Villaggio Solidale in Lurano and Corte dei Massari in Castel Cerreto. The UMD researchers have conducted four week-long participatory workshops with the Villaggio Solidale community in the summers of 2022, 2023, and 2024 and in the winter of 2024.

Located in the heart of the Lombardia Region in Northern Italy, the Solidarity Landscape project is set between Milan and Venice in the agricultural Po Valley. In antiquity, this landscape was said to be occupied by Lake Gerundo, a massive, shallow lake surrounded by wetlands and forests. Legend says the lake was home to the mythological dragon Tarantasio, a metaphor for an ecology where water and humans co=habited the land. While the lake has dried up, water remains an important part of this landscape, either contained in canals or springing from the earth in the fontanili, remnant ecological patches of natural springs. Today, this landscape is dominated by commercial agriculture and industry, which support the needs of urban centers like Milan and Bergamo rather than the nearby small towns. Yet, it is also a landscape rich in productivity and biodiversity. Key among all landscape presences is the ecology of the fontanili, some of which are located at the northern edge of the Villaggio Solidale housing complex. Its residents actively use them for recreation, education, and nature therapy. However, due to drought and increasing temperatures resulting from climate change, the fontanili have been dry in recent years.

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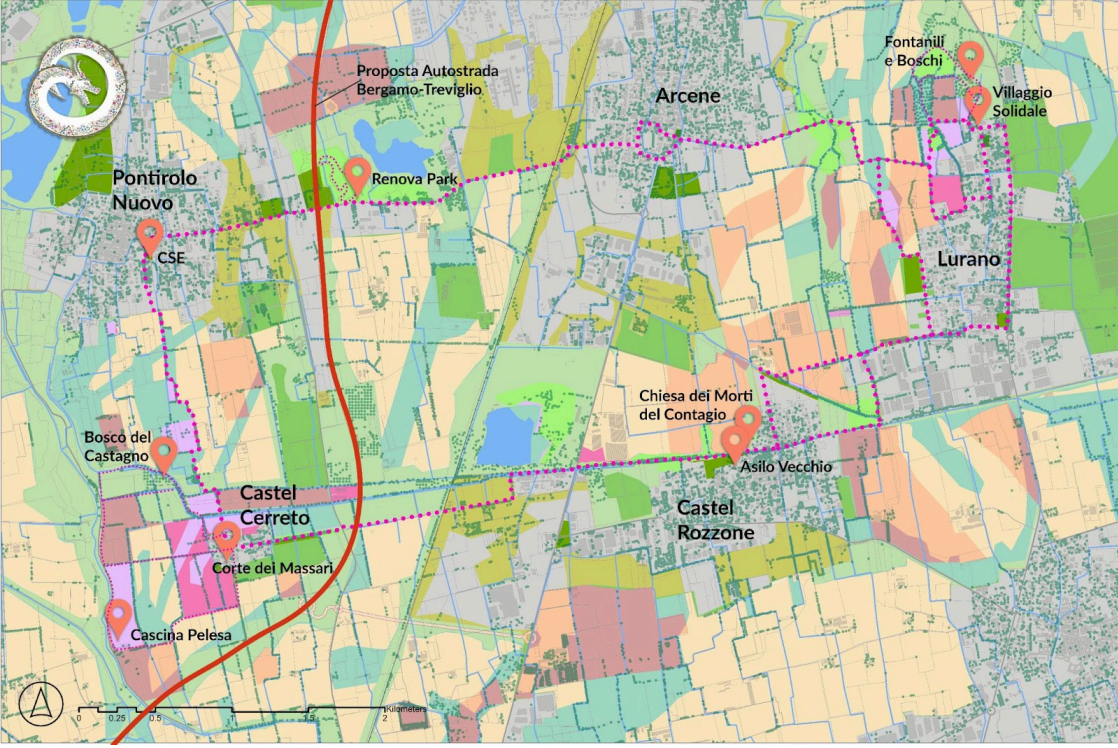




Villaggio Solidale is located at the northmost end of Lurano in the Bergamo region of Italy. Its surrounding landscape mainly consists of farmland with a few patches of woods. *Photo Source: Patrick Boyle*

The *fontanili* are not the only landscapes affected by changes. Agriculture is also undergoing changes and adaptations because of new policies and agricultural economics, prompting us to consider its future and how it might continue supporting residents' well-being and livelihood. Additionally, the Bergamo-Treviglio highway has been proposed to bisect the landscape included in this study, threatening fragile ecosystems, traditional and organic farms, heritage sites, and community connections.

The University of Maryland researchers, Villaggio Solidale residents and staff, and local partner organizations have worked collaboratively to understand this unique landscape and co-create solutions to address the threats of climate change, drought, and the proposed Bergamo-Treviglio highway that may affect this region in the near future and alter its current functions, both economic and agricultural.



The study area consists of the landscapes connecting the towns of Lurano, Arcene, Pontirolo Nuovo, Castel Cerreto, and Castel Rozzone. *A proposed highway threatens to bisect this area, potentially disturbing valuable farmland, fragile ecosystems, and heritage sites. Image by Patrick Boyle and Mary Christensen*

Community Map

Consorzio FA has been an instrumental partner in this project. Consorzio FA is a consortium of four social cooperatives in the Bergamo Province. These cooperatives focus on improving the lives and opportunities of the underprivileged by providing them with a home, community, and training. Villaggio Solidale, one of the co-housing communities operated by Consorzio FA, has provided housing and social services to more than 200 individuals since it opened in 2018, including foster children, young adults, adults with disabilities, and single-parent families in need. They also provide opportunities for adults with disabilities to learn employment and autonomy skills to learn to live independently.

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The Villaggio Solidale staff and community accomplish this work by practicing solidarity and enacting social capital. The staff of Villaggio Solidale describes solidarity as a value that encourages empathy, unity, attention, care, and support of others. Solidarity cannot happen without social capital, relationships, and connections built over time. As the research team learned more about the Villaggio Solidale community and its surrounding landscape, they saw the potential in linking solidarity and social capital through a landscape where these principles can be activated and cultivated beyond the confines of Villaggio Solidale to benefit the well-being of the greater community and the ecology of the entire region. Thus, the Solidarity Landscape was born.



The Consorzio FA communities of practice include adults with disabilities, foster children, foster parents, young adults, single-parent families, and staff. *Image by Mary Christensen*

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Values



An Illustration of the Solidarity Landscape by Mary Christensen. *The flower's petals display a shared definition of solidarity, being "pollinated" with tenants of social capital. The solidarity landscape is where solidarity and social capital grow and thrive.*

The Solidarity Landscape Living Lab Process

There have been four community workshops for the Solidarity Landscape Living Lab. These workshops have been structured as participatory, co-design processes with the Villaggio Solidale community. Many students involved in the workshops participated in the LED2LEAP and OLA online seminars and intensive workshops. They implemented principles of Landscape Democracy taught in the LED2LEAP and OLA courses as they participated in the Solidarity Landscape Living lab workshops.

2022 Workshop | The Tarantasio Agricultural Garden: Master Planning a Solidarity Landscape
August 17-24, 2022

The first workshop was held in Lurano, Italy, in August 2022. Dr. Deni Ruggeri and project partner Marco Vanoli led the workshop with four graduate students - three from the University of Maryland and one from the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

The goal of the 2022 workshop was to outline a vision for a landscape physically and conceptually linking two charitable organizations in neighboring towns: Consorzio FA/Villaggio Solidale in Lurano and FIEB/Corte dei Massari in Castel Cerreto. The clients, Consorzio FA and Fondazione Instituto Educativi Bergamo (FIEB), tasked the Living Lab with developing a participatory, strategic master plan to help link the two communities into a new landscape system that would improve both the landscape and the people living in it.





Images from the August 2022 workshop by Mary Christensen. Left: *The Tarantasio Garden prototype.*
Right: *Bonding and singing with the Villaggio Solidale community*

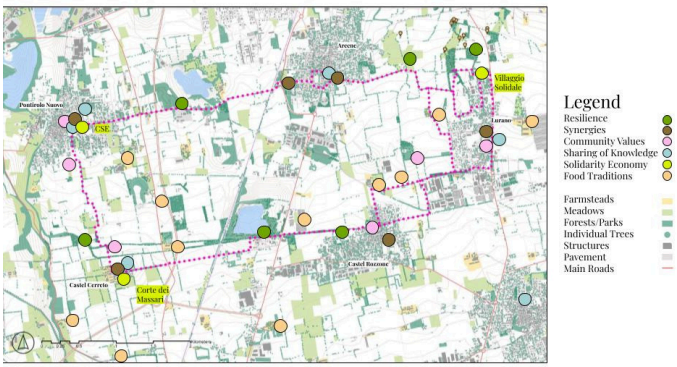
This workshop endeavored to build on people's current experiences in the landscape and hidden ambitions and help connect stakeholders and their environments. Through participatory activities such as listening, guided meditation, drawing, co-designing, and prototyping, the research team began to co-create a vision for a pedestrian- and bike-friendly trail linking the communities to selected agricultural, ecological, solidarity, and heritage sites. Thus, the idea for the Tarantasio Trail was born.





Images of the "Landscape Architect For a Day," *a co-design activity with residents of Villaggio Solidale, August 2022. Photos by Mary Christensen*

The Final Trail Layout



The proposed Tarantasio Trail connecting Villaggio Solidale in Lurano and Corte dei Massari in Castel Cerreto, by Patrick Boyle and Mary Christensen

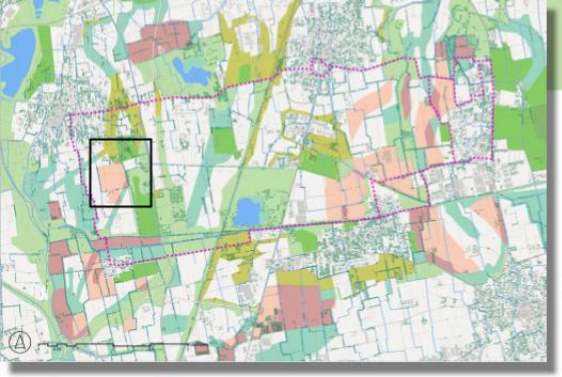
2023 Workshop | Advancing the Tarantasio Agricultural Garden: Solidarity Landscape from Idea to Implementation | July 12–19, 2023

The second workshop, led by Dr. Deni Ruggeri, Dr. David Myers, and Marco Vanoli, took place in July 2023. Seven graduate students and two undergraduate students from the University of Maryland participated. The goal was to advance the vision for an extended agroecological district called the Tarantasio Garden.

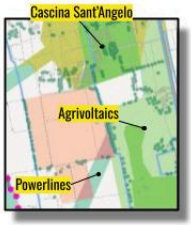
Images showing the nature scavenger hunt and solar printing activity with the children residents of Villaggio Solidale July 2023. Photos by Mary Christensen





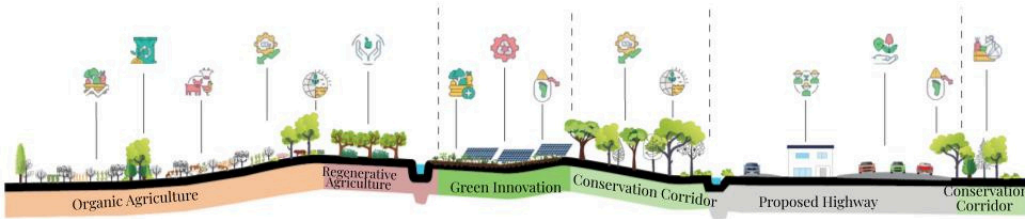


Conservation Agriculture Zones



Legend

- Solidarity Lab
- Solidarity Park
- Regenerative Agriculture
- Agroforestry
- Green Innovation
- Organic Agriculture
- Undefined Agriculture
- Open Space & Recreation
- Conservation Buffer
- Conservation Corridor
- Green Neighborhood
- Commercial/Residential

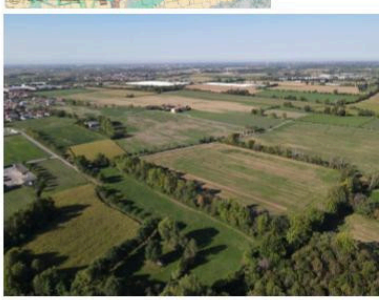


Applying agroecology concepts for proposed conservation zones in the Tarantasio Agricultural Garden. By Patrick Boyle

Lurano's Transition







Numbers based on 40 year lifespan (iTree), Yearly SOC compounded by AMG; WHC (water-holding capacity)

Before and after, the transformation of Lurano's landscape is shown when agroecology is practiced. By Patrick Boyle



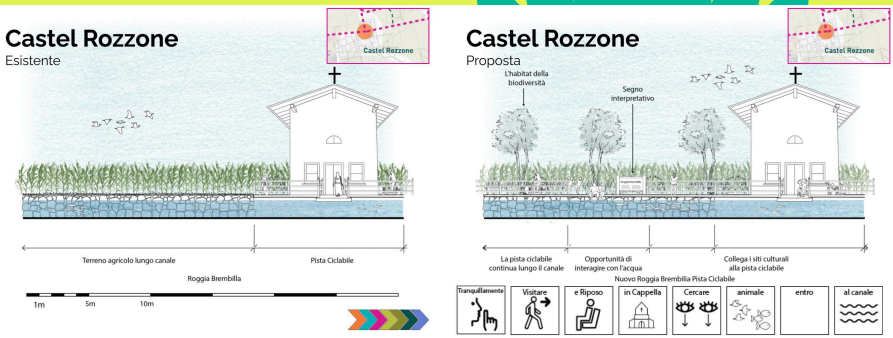


Left: The "My Dream Garden" collage activity with Villaggio Solidale Autonomy Training Services participants. Right: Re-vamping the Tarantasio Garden prototype with Villaggio Solidale residents July 2023. Photos by Mary Christensen

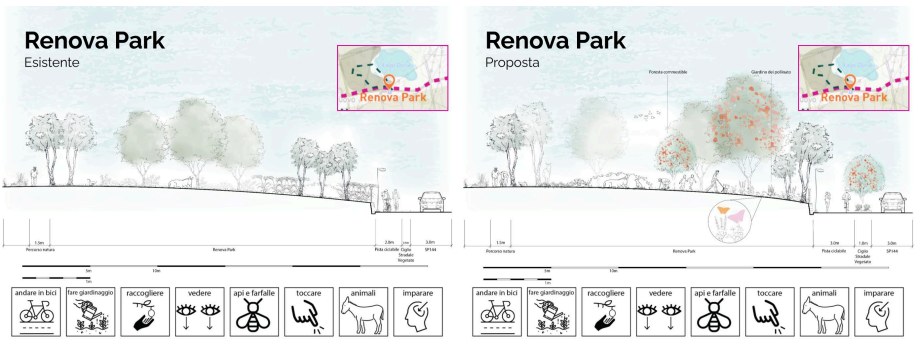
The research team worked closely with the Villaggio Solidale residents and community partners to understand their landscape knowledge and experiences. They engaged the community in participatory activities such as listening, site visits, a nature scavenger hunt, art projects, and revisiting the prototype from the previous workshop.

Through extensive fieldwork, the student team refined the design of the Tarantasio Trail and determined the locations of several trail nodes to invite further landscape exploration.

Students designed in detail how such landscapes would look and function at these strategic locations, connecting communities, landscapes, and experiences to foster individual, community, and ecological well-being.



Before and after sections showing the Castel Rozzone trail node. By Micaela Ada



Before and after sections illustrating the Renova Park trail node. By Javiera Diaz-Ortiz



The 2023 research team with Consorzio FA staff at Villaggio Solidale, July 2023. Team members include: Marco Vanoli, Micaela Ada, Maia Kessler, Erin Callahan, Mary Christensen, Katie McCormick, Patrick Boyle, Eve Josar, Deni Ruggeri, Javiera Diaz-Ortiz, Auran Zaman, and David Myers

2024 Mini Workshop | Solidarity Landscape Ambassadors January 9–13, 2024

The third workshop was a smaller event with Dr. Deni Ruggeri, Marco Vanoli, and research assistant Mary Christensen, a graduate student from the University of Maryland. This workshop explored the solidarity system within Villaggio Solidale and the larger community. The researchers engaged with the community's social workers and educators to learn about their educational and social work practices and experience how they use the landscape with their students and clients. During site visits and interactive educational activities, they visited community partners and engaged in deep listening with the educators, social workers, and community members. The research team observed winter landscape interactions and usage and participated in community routines and activities. They performed fieldwork and site observations of nodes for the Tarantasio Trail.





Left: Visiting with participants of the CSE (Center for Adults with Disabilities) in Pontirolo Nuovo. Right: Walking with students of Spazio Autismo, a school for children with autism in Castel Cerreto. Photos by Mary Christensen

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Top: *During the solidarity mapping exercise, participants identified places where solidarity is practiced and sites where it could happen in the future. By Mary Christensen* ***Lower Left:*** *Teaching the second lesson of the Solidarity Landscape Ambassador training course at Villaggio Solidale.* ***Lower Right:*** *the Solidarity Mapping exercise with educators and social workers from the community. Photos by Mary Christensen*

Part of Mary Christensen's Master of Landscape Architecture thesis work involved co-creating the Solidarity Landscape Ambassador training curriculum with Villaggio Solidale educators and social workers.

During the workshop, she taught the second lesson of the four-lesson series in person at Villaggio Solidale. The lesson included group discussions on landscape theories, nature-based interventions, a solidarity mapping activity, and connecting with new project partners.

2024 Workshop | Refining the Vision of the Solidarity Landscape: Connecting Agroecology, Community, and Nature for Well-being | June 4-12, 2024

The third workshop, which included four graduate students and one undergraduate student from the University of Maryland, took place in June 2024. The purpose of this workshop was to continue advancing the vision for an extended agroecological corridor and design in detail how such a landscape would look and function at various key locations: the landscape of Villaggio Solidale and the recently acquired fields to the north of it, key nodes along the proposed Trarantasio Trail, and Castel Cerreto's terminus.



Engaging in local agriculture. Left: A visit to Cascina Pelesa, a local organic you-pick farm in Castel Cerreto. Right: Co-design with new partners from Asilo Vecchio at their urban farm in Castel Rozzone. Photos by Mary Christensen

The research team did in-depth mapping and field work along the proposed trail and engaged in participatory activities with the community, including listening, site visits, co-design with new project partners, an interactive lesson on pollinators, co-creating seed bombs, and rejuvenating the Tarantasio Garden prototype from the previous workshops.

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Engaging with Villaggio Solidale residents. Left: Teaching a song about ecology and making seed bombs. Right: Teaching a pollinator lesson to children attending a summer camp in the woods near Villaggio Solidale. Photos by Mary Christensen



The 2024 research team: Patrick Boyle, Felix Hernandez, Marco Vanoli, Mary Christensen, Kelly Rassmussen, and Laura Crocker. Not pictured: Deni Ruggeri

Transferable Approaches from this Living Lab

Methods (for detailed descriptions of methods see the method worksheets)

1

Landscapes of the Heart Guided Meditation

The Landscapes of the Heart guided meditation and drawing activity was done with Villaggio Solidale residents during the first workshop in 2022. The activity revealed themes researchers saw in many drawings, including home, attachment, comfort, climate change, the near-universal draw to water, and the frequent appearance of the Alps. Participants learned about community and family relationships from the experiences shared by the residents. We saw drawings and listened to descriptions of journeys, which many residents have experienced as recent immigrants to Italy.

2

Landscape Architect for a Day Co-design Activity

The Landscape Architect for a Day co-design activity was done during the August 2022 workshop. The co-design activity included Villaggio Solidale residents and Autonomy Training Services (SFA) participants. These mapping activities revealed the participants' ambitions for their landscape to become an active place to play and continue building community bonds. They want this to be a productive landscape where they can build community, grow food, and learn new skills. The maps show the landscape and community as they want to experience it.

3

Nature Scavenger Hunt

The Nature Scavenger Hunt activity was done during the July 2023 workshop and included children and staff of Villaggio Solidale. Mary Christensen partnered with Alessandra D'Anna, a staff member of Villaggio Solidale, to create the scavenger hunt worksheets and guide the children through the woods and fontanili near Villaggio Solidale. This activity was meant to gauge the children's interest and comfort in engaging with the landscape and test their eco-literacy while familiarizing themselves with the local flora and fauna. Participants explored many features of the forest, including bark textures, spider webs, flowers, and edible plants. The activity lasted about 45 minutes, and the participants gathered the items on the list, which were brought back to the village to be sorted, discussed, and used to create art with the found objects so that the children could share their findings with the community.

4

Dream Garden Collage

During the July 2023 workshop, researchers visited the SFA participants to learn about their experiences in the landscape as adults with disabilities and mobility challenges. As they talked, they did the Dream Garden Collage Activity together. During this activity, they not only learned about the dream landscapes of the participants, but they also told the researchers about a nearby community garden project. The SFA participants discussed their gardening experiences and explained that gardening can change their attitude and outlook. This led to a discussion about their desire for a space to garden at Villaggio Solidale.

5

Solidarity Mapping Activity

The Solidarity Mapping Activity was part of the Solidarity Landscape Ambassador lesson presented to Villaggio Solidale staff, social workers, and educators during the January 2024 workshop. The lesson included a discussion about solidarity and social capital. Then, they participated in a co-mapping activity to examine where solidarity was practiced in the landscape (illustrated by the colorful dots). Participants were then asked to place purple hearts for potential sites for solidarity in their landscape. This was instructive as it showed where solidarity is practiced, where it could happen, and illustrated where it is missing.

6

Lesson on Pollinators and Native Plants

Villaggio Soildale held a nature-based summer camp in the woods next to the village in June 2024. The researchers prepared a lesson on pollinators and native plants to share with the children during the camp. The children were well-versed in the importance of pollinators and eager to share their knowledge. The participants played a game prepared by the research team to match pollinators with the native flowers they preferred.

7

Seed Bombs

The summer camp participants and SFA participants then joined the research team to learn a song about pollinators. Then, they created seed bombs together as a way to spread the seeds of the Solidarity landscape.

8

Guest Lectures on Local Initiatives

Researchers learned about new project partners working to create an urban agriculture site, Asilo Vecchio, in nearby Castel Rozzone during the Solidarity Mapping activity in January 2024. Asilo Vecchio is located on the proposed Tarantasio Trail. The Asilo Vecchio team shares goals and values similar to those of the Solidarity Landscape project. They are now project partners, and collaboration has begun to help them develop their site. During the June 2024 workshop, researchers and the Asilo Vecchio team began co-designing their garden.

9 Deep Listening

The conversations, activities, and visits throughout this participatory research contributed insights into the lives of the community members, the routines they follow, the educational and social services they participate in, and an understanding of the challenges they encounter when accessing the landscape. These experiences have taught researchers how solidarity is practiced in the community and revealed the community's desire for more opportunities to experience and connect to the landscape.

Through listening, researchers also learned about the community member's needs and wants regarding the landscape. From Davide, we learned about accessibility challenges for people in wheelchairs and what it means to be an accessibility activist. We learned that while nature can benefit and heal many people, some need more than it can offer and require a whole system of services and help to live a decent life. From Farmer Fabio, we learned about the challenges of being an organic farming pioneer in his area as he spoke about recent droughts, the burden of being one of only a few organic farmers in the region, and his desire to educate the public on healthy farming practices.

Some of our favorite listening activities happened with the educators and students at Spazio Autismo in Castel Cerreto, where we saw solidarity practiced throughout the school day. The educators taught us about the symbol-based language many use as a communication aid in the Autism Community. We have incorporated these symbols in the trail signage and wayfinding designs so all users can understand landscape experiences throughout the proposed eco-district.

10 Prototyping

The Tarantasio vertical garden is a prototype or a physical representation of the larger conceptual Tarantasio Agricultural Garden. We built the original garden together with Villaggio Solidale residents during the 2022 workshop to bring the community together with a project, test their desire and ability to care for it, and leave the community with a small garden that could benefit them, providing herbs, strawberries, and beautiful flowers to enjoy. The researchers and residents re-vamped the plantings together during the 2023 and 2024 workshops, deciding to continually add annuals rather than perennial plants to update the garden throughout the seasons.

For detailed instructions / workshop materials on these methods, please see the OLA website for downloadable method cards.

Impact of the Living Lab

We have monitored the living lab process through careful note-taking, photography, public presentations, and written reports, including two Master of Landscape Architecture theses and one published article. Each participatory method was documented through notes, recollections, and photography, and then assessed through content analysis. The collective information is now published in a dedicated website, serving as an open-access hub for sharing our PAR process and engaging current and future partners.

Our project partner, Marco Vanoli, has implemented a social impact assessment with Villaggio Solidale residents to measure the landscape and living lab's impact on their lives. Mary Christensen conducted a post-training curriculum survey of Villaggio Solidale staff who participated in the Solidarity Landscape Ambassadors' training course. Regarding the training course, one participant stated, "I have always believed in these topics before taking the class. I know that nature is healing, but I am glad to know that there are scientific studies about this so I can share and apply them."

To assess the impact of the Solidarity Living Lab activities on their learning, Deni Ruggeri and Mary Christensen created a survey to capture University of Maryland student reflections on personal and professional growth. Participants praised the Living Lab's relevance to landscape democracy and reported having meaningful interactions with the community's residents, staff, and partner organizations during site visits and participatory activities, but expressed a desire for more structure and clearer expectations of deliverables for the workshops.

One student wrote: "I learned a lot about participatory design and [saw] a lot of case studies during OLA, but hadn't been able to apply any of those design theories and practices with actual residents. [The co-design activity with a local partner] helped teach me how to navigate a co-creation process, where the community members are the ones who should be in the driver's seat [...]. I wouldn't have had that experience in the studio, so I was grateful to be able to learn from the co-creation activity."



Accessibility activist Davide Paolella spoke with the research team about landscape accessibility challenges in July 2023 and June 2024

Farmer Fabio Proverbio discussed the challenges and opportunities of organic farming in an area dominated by commercial agriculture in July 2023 and June 2024. Photo by Mary Christensen



Reflection: Failures and Success Factors

One of the project's most transformative concepts was the Tarantasio Trail, envisioned as a linear garden blending agriculture, ecological restoration, and heritage conservation. This trail fosters social capital, community identity, stewardship, and solidarity, preparing communities to adapt to climate, social, and economic changes. It empowers them to reclaim a sense of control over their futures. This vision aligns with landscape democracy, where landscapes are seen as a human right and a shared responsibility to preserve.

The project also reflected on the relationship between landscapes and health, framing health as systemic and relational. On a regional scale, landscapes offer opportunities for recreation, physical activity, and improved air quality while fostering day-to-day interactions that bridge social divides and combat loneliness. At the site level, the Tarantasio Trail acts as a connector of affordances for nature-based healing and biophilia, re-educating society about the importance of mutualistic relationships with the environment. These connections strengthen individuals and communities, providing balance during change.

The project's success hinged on its participatory and democratic approach to landscape transformation. It brought together a diverse coalition of stakeholders, including residents, vulnerable individuals, children, social workers, non-profits, government agencies, farmers, agricultural schools, and activists. Through one-on-one listening sessions and moments of dialogue, the project created spaces for participants to share their experiences, fears, and aspirations. This collaborative process fostered a collective "story of us," which became the foundation for shared stewardship of the vision and the landscapes it aimed to transform.

Communication channels in the local language

The Solidarity Living Lab website:
https://sites.google.com/umd.edu/solidaritylandscape

The Solidarity Landscape Documentary (in Italian):
https://youtu.be/GhI_zjTYaac?si=pBR5zdWz0pzgX6BP

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Authors + Contacts



Deni Ruggeri, Ph.D. MLA, MRP is an Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Maryland. His research and teaching focus on landscape democracy, participation, place attachment, and urban agriculture. He applies Participatory Action Research to create democratic landscape transformations that enhance human and ecological health. Dr. Ruggeri is a partner in the EU-funded Open Landscape Academy, educating professionals on participatory design. He has published 25 book chapters and journal articles and co-edited Defining Landscape Democracy (2019) and Urban Agriculture in Public Space (2024).



Mary Christensen, MLA, is the project manager of the Solidarity Living Lab. She is an adjunct faculty at the Community College of Baltimore County and a lecturer at the University of Maryland.

For more information about the Solidarity Living Lab, please visit our website at https://sites.google.com/umd.edu/solidaritylandscape.

Inquiries about the project can be directed to Deni Ruggeri at druggeri@umd.edu or Mary Christensen at mchrist5@umd.edu

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Methods from the Living Lab

Transferable tools used in the Villaggio Solidale Living Lab to inspire your local lab

Vertical Garden Prototype

Co-designing with salvaged materials



Figure 1: Showing the completed vertical gardens with youth participants
Photo: Mary Christensen



Figure 2: Painting the pallet garden structure
Photo: Mary Christensen

What is this, and what is it used for?

Building a prototype vertical garden (in this case, the Tarantasio Garden, named after a dragon from local mythology) is a way to collectively build a small version of the larger landscape where participants can test ideas and approaches to the landscape on a smaller scale. The researchers and participants partnered together to build, paint, and plant the vertical garden using salvaged materials. This act of co-creation built a sense of shared responsibility for the success of the garden.

This can be planted as an herb garden, a strawberry patch, or with annuals and perennials.

Authors

Mary Christensen, Deni Ruggeri

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How is it done?

1. Sketch out design ideas for the arrangement of the vertical garden
2. Gather pallets
3. Cut and sand pallets to the desired size
4. Fasten pallets together into the desired configuration
5. Paint the pallets - in this case, the boys and girls formed teams and chose to paint their own distinct designs
6. Secure landscape fabric on the inside of the pallets using a large staple gun to form pokets for the soil
7. Assemble the garden in a sunny spot near a water source
8. Fill the landscape fabric pockets with potting soil
9. Plant small plants in desired arrangements
10. Maintain the garden by regularly watering and weeding the plants -
    a. Re-plant as necessary

Materials

- Wood pallets
- Hand saw
- Metal brackets and screws
- Screwdriver and/or drill
- Outdoor paint
- Paint brushes
- Landscape fabric
- Scissors
- Staple gun and staples
- Potting soil
- A variety of small plants (herbs, annuals, perennials)
- Water
- Sunlight

Prerequisites

It is helpful to do the tandem walk + chalk drawing activity together (or a similar activity) before this activity to brainstorm ideas and have more concrete ideas and physical reminder of the area

Time required

20-45 minutes+ depending how much detail is added, discussion time, size of group

Number of people

Group project, available for as many participants as needed. Larger groups may just want to print out a larger map so there is enough room for people to work and lay out their markings.

Solidarity Mapping

From Understanding to Action: Mapping Regional Solidarity."



Figure 1: One of the Solidarity Maps produced in a January 2024 workshop in Lurano, Italy. Photo: Mary Christensen



Figure 2: Collective discussion around the Solidarity Map. Photo: Mary Christensen

What is this, and what is it used for?

The Solidarity Mapping exercise engaged participants in a collaborative mapping exercise to create a shared definition of solidarity and how it manifests in their region. This activity asked participants to consider their experiences and share their perspectives on how solidarity is practiced throughout their region. Not only did it help us reflect on where and how solidarity is enacted in the area, but also where it is missing and could happen in the future (shown in purple hearts).

By identifying areas where solidarity is present (represented in colors like yellow, pink, orange, blue, and green) and highlighting spaces where it could be strengthened or fostered in the future (shown with purple hearts), the exercise encourages critical thinking, dialogue, and collective action. It empowers participants to reflect on their experiences, envision change, and contribute to building a more inclusive, just, and connected community. The use of color-coded markers and hearts creates an accessible and visual way for participants to express complex social concepts like solidarity.

The map becomes a tangible tool that captures the community's understanding of solidarity and its potential. This visual representation can be shared with others to raise awareness, stimulate further discussions, or be used as a planning tool for future initiatives that aim to strengthen solidarity within the region.

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Authors

Mary Christensen, Deni Ruggeri

How is it done?

1. Have a group discussion on an important value shared by the community - in this case the focus was on solidarity
2. Ask group members to work to create a shared definition of this value
3. Reflecting on this definition, ask group members to identify places where this value is successfully being demonstrated in their community.
    a. As locations are identified, participants can then choose a paper dot to write a description on and attach to the map.
4. Next, using a different shape - we used hearts - ask participants to identify new locations, areas, or organizations where this value can occur in the future
5. As a group, discuss the results of the mapping exercise
    a. Patterns seen in the maps
    b. Hidden or previously unknown resources
    c. Potential partners to engage with in the future
    d. Connections or relationships between areas in the landscape where solidarity is a strong feature and value
    e. Gaps in solidarity - or services or infrastructure, etc.

Materials

- Large printed maps of the region
- Small color-coded cut out shapes or even sticky notes
- Pens and markers
- Scissors
- Tape

Prerequisites

An understanding of Solidarity

Time required

1 hour

Number of people

It would be best to use this in a large group setting with people representing different interests and backgrounds.

Nature Scavenger Hunt

Exploration and hands-on learning in nature





Figure 1 & 2: Examples of scavenger hunt scorecards for activity. Photo: Mary Christensen

What is this, and what is it used for?

The Nature Scavenger Hunt combines exploration, learning, and reflection to build stronger connections to the landscape and foster collaborative problem-solving.
It encourages participants to actively engage with the landscape through hands-on learning rather than just observing it. This can lead to greater environmental awareness and appreciation of the natural world as participants learn about local flora, fauna, and local biodiversity and ecosystems.

Authors

Mary Christensen

How is it done?

1. Study the local landscape and its flora, fauna, and ecosystems
2. Create a scavenger hunt featuring photos and explanations of plants, insects, and other natural features to "hunt"
3. Gather a group of participants and share infromation about the activity and the landscape where you will do your scavenger hunt
4. Walking together in the landscape, work as teams or individually to find and gather items on your scavenger hunt list. When items are found, use the opportunity to discuss their uses, textures, colors, how they grow, etc.
5. When the scavenger hunt is complete, lay out the found items and discuss them further.
6. Found items can then be used to create nature art such as mobiles and solar prints

Materials

- Scavenger hunt lists
- Pens, markers, or pencils
- Clipboards
- Small bags for gathering items
- Scissors
- A landscape to explore

Prerequisites

None

Time required

1 hour

Number of people

2 - 10 people or more

Nature Memory Game

Inclusive interactions with nature experiences





Figures 1 & 2: Making and playing the Nature Memory Game with project participants. Photo: Mary Christensen

What is this, and what is it used for?

The Nature Memory Game was designed for adults with disabilities and focused on engagement, empowerment, and collaborative learning. This game provided an educational and therapeutic experience while encouraging active participation in the process of learning about and experiencing nature, even when unable to physically experience nature on any given day. The matching game included images of local flora, fauna, and even some nearby heritage sites. The game encourages participants to celebrate connections with the environment and deepen their understanding of the natural world, promoting stewardship and fostering a sense of responsibility for their landscape.

Authors

Deni Ruggeri and Mary Christensen

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How is it done?

The game was assembled by researchers from UMD who drew images of local flora, fauna, and heritage sites. These images were glued onto pieces of thin sheets of basswood for easy handling.

Participants and researchers played the game together by spreading the wood tiles image-side down on a table and mixing them up. After organizing the tiles into a grid, participants turned over two tiles at a time to see if they matched. This is repeated until all of the tiles have been turned over. The person with the most tiles is the winner.

Materials

- 2"x2" pieces of basswood, wooden craft sheets, or chipboard
- Paper, pencil, colored pencils, scissors, markers, or other drawing materials
- Liquid craft glue or Modge Podge
- Foam brushes

Prerequisites

None

Time required

To build the game: 2+ hours
To play the game: 15 minutes

Number of people

At least 2-4 people

Nature Art: Mobiles and Solar Prints

Nature and the Creative Process

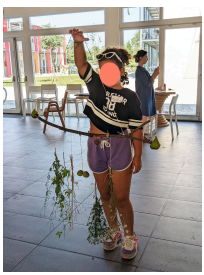






Figure 1: Nature Mobiles

Figure 2 & 3: Creating the solar prints with found objects. Photos: Mary Christensen

What is this, and what is it used for?

Making art with items found on the Nature Scavenger Hunt created art for the children involved in the activity to share with their community and created moments of collective reflection. This creative process is not only about crafting art but also about fostering deeper connections to the environment, building community, and empowering participants to engage with the world around them.

Authors

Mary Christensen

How is it done?

For the nature mobiles:

1. Collect leaves, flowers, nuts, sticks, and interesting rocks from your landscape
2. Sort and discuss items collected during the Nature Scavenger Hunt
3. Choose a stick that is roughly 2 feet long and tie a string or twine to two ends of the stick to create a hanger for the mobile.
    a. Hang this stick from a doorway or two chairs for support
4. Select several of your favorite nature items to display on your mobile.
5. Using string or twine, tie the various items to the top mobile stick
6. Display the mobiles for all to enjoy!

For the nature solar prints:

1. Collect leaves, flowers, nuts, sticks, and interesting rocks from your landscape
2. Sort and discuss items collected during the Nature Scavenger Hunt
3. Select several of your favorite nature items and arrange them on the solar print paper
4. Lay the specimens and solar print paper in the sun for 5-10 minutes
5. Bring the solar paper inside and immediately run it under water. The paper will turn dark blue and the shapes of the nature items will turn white.
6. Allow the prints to dry by laying on a flat surface
7. Display the solar prints for all to enjoy!

Materials

For the nature mobiles:

- Items collected in nature - leaves, flowers, nuts, sticks, interesting rocks, etc.
- A 1-2 foot long stick or branch
- Twine or string
- Maybe a hot glue gun could come in handy

For the nature solar prints:

- Solar print paper (cyanotype)
- Items collected in nature – leaves, flowers, nuts, sticks, interesting rocks, etc.
- A flat, sunny surface
- A sink for rinsing the prints

Prerequisites

None

Time required

30 minutes or more

Number of people

1-10

Landscapes of the Heart

Guided meditation and drawing exercise



Figure 1: Drawings from the 2022 Solidarity Landscape Living Lab Workshop. Photos: Mary Christensen

What is this, and what is it used for?

This guided meditation and drawing exercise encourages participants to reflect on landscapes that are meaningful to them. The resulting drawings of real or imagined landscapes and group discussions about the drawings offer insights into personal landscape experiences, preferences, ambitions, and themes, helping researchers and community members better understand each other and the landscapes they are working with.

Authors

Deni Ruggeri

OLA

How is it done?

The following guided meditation prompts are given before the drawing exercise. After the prompts are provided, participants are asked to consider them as they draw their favorite landscapes – real or imagined.

1. Imagine your favorite landscape, the landscape that represents your ambitions for the future, your view of a good, fulfilling life. What are your feelings as you approach it?
2. Are there views you can see in the distance? What kind of views are these? Is there water in the distance? Can you touch it? Is the vegetation surrounding you dense or sparse?
3. What colors do you see around you? What textures do you see? Are they rough or smooth?
4. Now, focus on the feelings the landscape inspires in you. Are they positive, happy feelings? Or are they feelings of discomfort? What are you thinking as you move through this space?
5. Now, prepare yourself to leave this landscape. Think of the feelings you are experiencing. Are you sad or relieved you are about to leave this space? Look around you and let the place around you sink in.

Materials

- Drawing materials: paper, crayons, pencils, markers, colored pencils, tape

Prerequisites

None

Time required

30 minutes to 1 hour

Number of people

This method is best done in groups. It can be done in person or online

Landscape Architect for a Day

Partnering with landscape architects in the design process

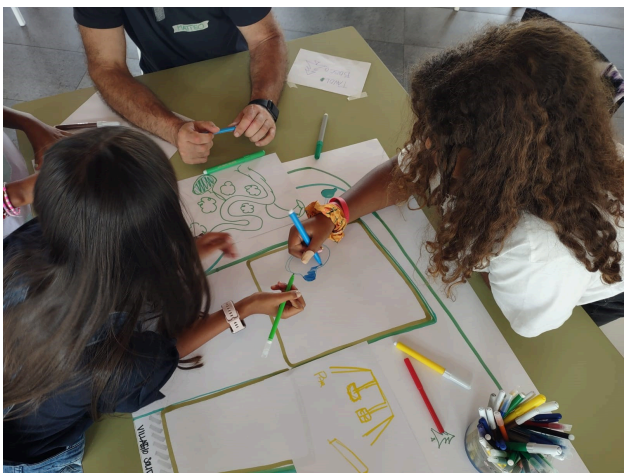


Figure 1: Landscape Architect for a Day co-design activity during the 2022 Solidarity Landscape Living Lab workshop. Photos: Mary Christensen

What is this, and what is it used for?

The Landscape Architect for a Day co-design activity engages participants in the process of designing and shaping their own environment. The participants collaborate with the researchers to co-create the landscapes of their dreams. This activity focuses on empowerment, community engagement, and fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility toward their landscape.

Authors

Deni Ruggeri

OLA

How is it done?

For the Landscape Architect For a Day activity, draw large, basic outline maps of the community or the landscape you work in. Include green spaces, buildings, and the surrounding streets. Use the following or similar prompts to consider as participants and researchers design the landscape together:

1. In which landscape would you like to play?
2. Think of what you would like to do in the landscape
3. Which is your favorite landscape? Why?
4. What makes you feel happy in this landscape?
5. In which landscape do you feel most comfortable?

Materials

- Maps of the area to be designed
- Large paper or poster board
- Drawing supplies: pencils, crayons, markers, colored pencils

Prerequisites

None

Time required

30 minutes to 1 hour

Number of people

This method is best done in groups.

Interactive Pollinator Lesson

Pollination lesson for community engagement



Figure 1: Local children and two UMD students participating in the Pollinator matching game, part of the Interactive Pollinator Lesson. Photos: Mary Christensen



Figure 2: Drawings of pollinators and plants made by the UMD students. Photos: Mary Christensen

What is this, and what is it used for?

An interactive lesson on pollinators and the plants they need serves a dual purpose: education and community-driven action. It aims to engage participants in learning about the essential relationship between pollinators (like bees, butterflies, birds, and other insects) and the plants that rely on them for reproduction. At the same time, it fosters a sense of shared responsibility in protecting pollinators and promoting biodiversity.

1. Builds awareness of the critical role pollinators play in ecosystems and food systems, biodiversity, and the production of fruits and vegetables.
2. Fosters empowerment by involving participants in an interactive setting - empowers them with knowledge and practical tools to help support pollinators
3. Collaborative learning fosters co-learning between the participants and researchers as they share insights

Authors

Mary Christensen, Laura Crocker, and Kelly Rassmussen

How is it done?

This includes giving a short, interactive lesson to discuss the importance of pollination in the landscape. Using plants and images, explain the benefits, habitats, and preferences of pollinators and the flowers and plants they need to thrive.

Researchers prepared a short lesson (see attached lesson plan - should be adjusted for local landscapes) and created images to support the lesson.

Present the lesson to the group of children.

Materials

- Visual aids (picture of pollination)
- Flower specimens or pictures
- Exercise
- Seed bomb creation

Prerequisites

None

Time required

30-40 minutes

Number of people

This method is best done in groups.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Objective:
By the end of the lesson, students will understand what pollination is, why it is important, and who the main pollinators are.

Materials:
- Visual aids (picture of pollination)
- Flower specimens or pictures
- Exercise
- Seed bomb creation

Introduction (5 minutes):
1. **Greeting and Warm-Up:** Begin with a short discussion about what students already know about flowers and pollination/pollinators.
2. **Engage with a Question:** Ask, "Have you ever wondered how flowers grow fruits and seeds?" and let students share their thoughts.

Lesson Core (15 minutes):
1. **What is Pollination?**
    - Let students share their thoughts
    - **Explanation:** Explain that pollination is the process where pollen from the male part of a flower (anther) is transferred to the female part (stigma) of the same or another flower. Pollen is plant cells in the form of powder that are produced by plants.
    - **Visual Aid:** Show a diagram of a flower and point out the anther, stigma, and pollen.
2. **Why is Pollination Important?**
    - Let students share their thoughts
    - **Explanation:** Discuss that pollination is crucial because it allows plants to produce fruits and seeds, which are essential for plant reproduction and growth. Pollination increases biodiversity in wild plant species, helping them to reproduce. Without pollination, we wouldn't have many of the foods we eat or the flowers we enjoy.
    - **Explanation:** Explain that native plants promote native pollinators. Not all plants look the same! This is because they support specific pollinators, which do not look and behave in the same ways. It is important for us to support plants that belong in Italy (native) in order to keep the ecosystem healthy.
    - **Activity:** Have students list their favorite fruits and vegetables, then explain that many of these are products of pollination.

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- **Who Pollinates?**
  - **Explanation:** Introduce the main pollinators:
    i. Bees pollinate a wide range of flowers. The flowers they pollinate depend on the type of bee it is. The honey bee pollinates a wide range of flowers while the solidarity bee chooses to pollinate specific species of flowers. Bees choose flowers that are brightly colored, although they can't see red, they are strongly scented, and have landing platforms.
    ii. Butterflies pollinate large clusters of flowers that are brightly colored and are open during the day. The flowers must be landing platforms and have lots of nectar.
    iii. Birds are attracted to flowers that are tubular or cup shaped and can support their weight like a flower on a bush. Birds like brightly colored flowers that are odorless. The pollen nectar is deep within the flower so the pollen is brushed on the bird's head and back, and that's how it transfers.
    iv. Bats are night animals who are attracted to flowers that open at night and are pale or white. The flowers are very fragrant and the nectar is deep within the flower so the bats use their tongue to get it.
    v. Beetles pollinate bowl shaped flowers in a wide range of colors that are open during the day. They choose singular flowers and ones that have a smaller amount of nectar.
    vi. Flies are attracted to dark colored flowers (purple and brown) that have bad smells like blood, dung, and rotting meat. The flowers are funnel shaped or have complex traps.
    vii. Wind pollinates long feathery plants that lack nectar or fragrance but produce large amounts of light pollen.

Hands-On Activities (15 minutes):

- **Pollinator Matching** (find your match): Create cutouts of the different types of pollinators and flowers. Assign each student as a specific flower/pollinator. (ex. I am a dark colored flower that smells bad = fly)

- **Seed Bombs:** Take clay, soil, and seeds and combine with water into a ball. Let it dry

Dream Garden Collage

Inclusive garden design to understand needs and desires of a community



Figures 1 & 2: Creating the collages as a group activity. Photos: Mary Christensen

What is this, and what is it used for?

The dream garden collage was an activity done with adults with disabilities to explore their vision for a garden or landscape that reflects their own needs and ambitions. This activity encouraged the participants to express their ideas, desires and needs for a garden space. Collaging is an accessible, hands-on method that does not rely on verbal or written skills alone, allowing participants to communicate visually. They could represent their dream gardens using images and materials. By actively participating in this activity, participants are given a voice and take on the role of decision-makers to shape their own environment.

Authors

Mary Christensen

How is it done?

1. Explain the activity to the participants – that they are going to use the images provided to create their own dream gardens
2. Provide participants with a wide variety of landscape images to choose from
3. While creating the collages, talk together about the participants' landscape experience. Allow participants to share what they enjoy, what they would change, and how they wish they could experience the landscape.

Materials

- Paper
- Glue
- Scissors
- Printed images from magazines, newspapers, media

Prerequisites

None

Time required

30-60 minutes

Number of people

1-20 people

Co-Creating Seed Bombs

Planting local wildflowers as a group activity





Figures 1, 2 & 3: Creating the seed bombs as a group activity. Photos: Mary Christensen

What is this, and what is it used for?

This was a quick follow-up activity with the Interactive Pollinator lesson. Making seed bombs with the community promoted community action. After learning about pollinators and the plants they rely on, we made seed bombs together using local wildflower seeds. By involving community members in this process, they could take ownership of supporting the local pollinator population in a fun way.

Authors

Mary Christensen

How is it done?

1. Take 1"-2" (2.5-5cm) pinches of air-dry clay and flatten them into the palm of your hand
2. Scoop potting soil onto the clay
3. Pour local wildflower seeds onto the soil
4. Fold together the clay, soil, and seeds.
5. Knead the mixture in your hands until the ingredients are thoroughly combined
6. Let the seed bombs sit in the sun to dry
7. Toss the seed bombs where you would like the flowers to bloom

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How is it done?

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6. Let the seed bombs sit in the sun to dry
7. Toss the seed bombs where you would like the flowers to bloom

Materials

- Tub of air-dry clay
- Potting Soil
- Wildflower seeds

Prerequisites

None

Time required

15-30 minutes to create the seed bombs
Let dry overnight

Number of people

1-20 people









Images made from the "dream garden collage" activity done with adults with disabilities to explore their vision for a garden or landscape that reflects their own needs and ambitions.
Photo: Mary Christensen

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Thank you for reading.

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