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RE-IMAGINE CULTURE-LED REGENERATION OF 8 URBAN EMPTY SPACES IN AN ECOLOGICAL WAY

Future
Divercities



ANTI Liepāja









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Introduction

FROM VACANT TO VITAL: HOW 8 EUROPEAN CITIES REIMAGINE URBAN REGENERATION

Over the past decades, European cities have undergone spatial, social, and ecological transformations.

Alongside processes of urban growth and redevelopment, a significant number of vacant and underused spaces have emerged: derelict lands, abandoned buildings, and overlooked “in-between” zones embedded in the urban fabric.

At the same time, cities, institutions, and communities have had to rethink the ways in which these spaces are approached, activated, and integrated into broader strategies of urban development.

Within this context, the *Future DiverCities* project set out to explore how culture-led regeneration could be reimagined as an ecological practice.

Future DiverCities is the continuation of a first Creative Europe project (2016-2020) implemented successfully by 10 partners in Europe and Canada, which has explored new ways to work in challenging urban areas through participatory methodologies and co-designed digital tools.

The project (2022-2026) unfolded across eight cities: Berlin, Zagreb, Liepaja, Kuopio, Marseille, Florence, Timișoara, and Athens, each offering distinct urban conditions, cultural ecosystems, and environmental challenges. Despite their differences, these cities shared a common feature: the presence of vacant or underutilised spaces and a growing interest in mobilizing these spaces as sites for experimentation and transformation.

Future DiverCities emerged from the recognition that traditional models of regeneration, often driven by economic growth and spatial redevelopment, were no longer sufficient in addressing contemporary urban challenges. The consortium responded to this need by positioning culture not only as a driver of social and economic vitality, but also as a catalyst for ecological awareness, restoration, and transformation.

At its core, the work aimed to pilot and test new uses of vacant urban spaces that could enhance urban ecology while fostering cultural innovation. Partners sought to accelerate the development of sustainable solutions and to strengthen the capacity of

cultural organisations to act as eco-conscious changemakers.

To support this, a dedicated learning programme, the *School of Feral Grounds* developed by *Trajna*, was created to build the knowledge and capacities of partners and their local coalitions. Structured around three study modules exploring human impacts on urban ecosystems, tools for reading site ecology, and strategies for designing regenerative landscapes, the School offered a critical framework for situating cultural practices within the urgent realities of the Anthropocene.

Complementing this, a cycle of webinars on *Practice and Knowledge Sharing*, coordinated by LAMA, brought together experts, artists, and urban practitioners from across the network to exchange innovative approaches at the intersection of art, culture, and urban transformation, addressing themes ranging from community gardening and urban biodiversity to collective narratives and sensitive mapping.

A central ambition of *Future DiverCities* was to move beyond isolated experiments and

Trajna is a cultural organisation and interdisciplinary group of designers, makers, architects, and ecologists whose work focuses on restoring multispecies collaborations in urban ecosystems. Currently occupying 18ha of the feral urban ground Krater, the collective is set to produce environmentally conscious materials, infrastructures, and pedagogies to create new alliances across science, policymaking, and cultural production.

→ [The School of Feral Grounds](#)

Practice and Knowledge Sharing is a series of talks, the program will bring together experts, practitioners, and project participants to discuss pressing issues and share innovative approaches.

→ [Webinars on Practice and Knowledge Sharing](#)

towards a more systemic understanding of culture-led regeneration. This meant focusing on consolidating an “ecosystemic” approach, one that recognised the interdependencies between cultural, social, and ecological systems.

To evaluate whether this approach was generating meaningful change, the University of Savonia developed a *Prospective Impact Assessment Process* (PIAP), implemented across all eight city pilots. Rather than measuring outcomes only at the end, this methodology enabled project teams to anticipate possible impacts early on, reflect on risks and opportunities, and adjust their actions accordingly. Grounded in participatory workshops and stakeholder engagement, the PIAP produced replicable tools adaptable to a wide range of contexts, and its findings were ultimately brought together in a research paper offering a forward-looking framework for eco-social regeneration and participatory urban governance.

Throughout its duration, *Future DiverCities* fostered a dynamic exchange of knowledge and experience among its participants. This

Read the research paper “Prospective Impact Assessment through Systemic and Eco-Social Future Design in the FutureDiverCities project” [here](#).

collaborative process was essential in building a shared understanding of how cultural practices could contribute to environmental sustainability, while remaining responsive to local specificities.

This publication brings together insights, experiences, and reflections from the pilot sites during that journey. It offers an opportunity to examine how culture-led regeneration can be reconceived in ecological terms, and to consider how such approaches might inform the future development of more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient cities across Europe.



BIODIVERSITY

The biodiversity cluster brought together projects that engaged directly with the ecological potential of vacant urban spaces. By foregrounding biodiversity, the projects explored how urban regeneration could move beyond human-centred design and instead foster new relationships between human and non-human inhabitants.

In this context, biodiversity was not only understood in biological terms, but also as a framework for rethinking coexistence in the city. The enhancement of plant life, soil health, and habitat diversity was seen as intrinsically linked to cultural practices, public engagement, and new forms of spatial awareness. Through interventions such as planting, rewilding, and ecological storytelling, these projects demonstrated how cultural action can actively contribute to the regeneration of urban ecosystems while reshaping how citizens perceive and interact with their environment.



Berlin

SENSITIVE MAPPING: ARTISTIC PRACTICES FOR LIVING ECOLOGIES

Working in Berlin's abandoned Spreepark and along the river communities of the Spree and the Elbe, Public Art Lab developed, tested, and transferred methodologies of sensitive mapping, living research, and bio-art to build local coalitions, translate ecological knowledge into cultural practice, and support inclusive and sustainable approaches to biodiversity.

Public Art Lab's biodiversity work unfolds at Spreepark in Berlin and along the river communities of the Spree and the Elbe—landscapes marked by abandonment, ecological regeneration, and accelerating transformation. Once left aside, these places have become refuges for multispecies life, now increasingly vulnerable to redevelopment, infrastructural transition, and changing patterns of use.

Public Art Lab (PAL) is a Berlin based action research lab and platform for urban media art that investigates, curates, and produces artistic projects in the urban public sphere at the intersection of media arts, urban planning and creative technologies. PAL is specialised in creative citymaking, citizen science and translocal dialogue that empower social interactions and citizens' engagement.

publicartlab-berlin.de

Public Art Lab approaches these sites as living laboratories, working with artists, scientists, local communities, and public institutions to explore how culture can support ecological care. Through sensitive mapping, citizen science, and artistic interventions, the project reveals hidden habitats and the entangled relationships between human and non-human actors that shape these environments.

PAL implements the biodiversity cluster of Future DiverCities in Berlin at Spreepark Art Space Berlin, extending to the river communities of the Spree and Elbe - in close relationship with Prof. Myriel Milicevic, Potsdam University of Applied Sciences (FHP), the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development (HNEE), Grün Berlin GmbH, Campus City Nature, TINCON, re:publica, Biosphärenreservat Flusslandschaft Elbe, Elbgarten Wittenberge, Demokratieforum Prignitz, Landesvereinigung kulturelle Kinder- und Jugendbildung (LKJ), Naturwacht Brandenburg, and BUND.

Public formats such as the Open Air Exhibitions and the Market of Biodiversity, the panel 'The River as Legal Entity' at Spreepark Art Space (Berlin and Wittenberge), and the Biodiversity in Action Lab (TINCON and re:publica Berlin) invited shared discovery, dialogue, and responsibility.

Together, these formats cultivate long-term bonds between people, place, and biodiversity while engaging with the coexistence of urban development and living ecologies. Through this range of public encounters, outcomes were shared in ways that demonstrate the scalability of the approach across diverse landscapes and communities.

The Berlin pilot addresses a key challenge of urban transformation: how to redevelop a long-abandoned site through culture while preserving the biodiversity and multispecies life that developed during years of neglect.

The Spreepark clearly reflects this tension. Once a popular amusement park, it later became an abandoned site where nature returned, and it is now being transformed into a cultural and recreational space. While this transformation offers new opportunities, it also risks overlooking ecological processes such as natural recovery of the site, non-human habitats, and multispecies coexistence due to economic interests, safety requirements, and planning priorities.

“How can ecological concerns be meaningfully integrated into the city-making process?”

At the start of the pilot, key questions emerged: how can these ecological concerns be meaningfully integrated into the city-making process? And how can





artistic narratives and scenarios help raise awareness and shift perspectives on urban biodiversity among decision-makers, local communities, and the wider public?

APPROACH

In response to this challenge, Public Art Lab developed a culture-led, participatory approach based on sensitive mapping and experimental cartography. Rather than treating biodiversity as a purely scientific or technical issue, the pilot combined artistic practices, ecological knowledge, and citizen engagement to make multispecies life visible, relatable, and culturally meaningful within the city-making process.

“Making non-human beings visible and giving them a voice to a wider public.”

The approach brought together artists, biologists, urban planners, policymakers, students, and local residents in a cross-sectoral collaboration. Through sense-in-place walks, field trips, sensitive mapping, and living research, ecological findings were embedded in social contexts and translated into artistic narratives and performative

scenarios. These narratives—developed for *The Park* (2023) and *The River* (2024-25)—allowed participants to experience the site from non-human perspectives and to engage emotionally as well as intellectually.

By using co-design processes and public exhibitions, the pilot created spaces for dialogue, learning, and shared responsibility. This approach helped integrate biodiversity concerns into cultural programming and urban transformation, while encouraging citizens to rediscover familiar places through memory, imagination, and multisensory experience.

Several key moments shaped and crystallised PAL's approach in the Berlin pilot: A first crucial decision was to treat biodiversity as a cultural and social issue, not only an ecological one. Early research showed that scientific data alone would not create lasting engagement, which led us to anchor the pilot in artistic practices and sensitive, experiential methods. A second decisive moment was the choice of sensitive mapping and experimental cartography as the core methodology.

KEY
MOMENTS +
DECISIONS



Panel: The River as a Legal Entity 2024 © Public Art Lab

This allowed PAL to connect ecological observations with personal memories, emotions, and everyday experiences, and to make non-human perspectives perceptible.

Building Local Coalitions from the very beginning (from July 2022) was another key step. Actively involving artists, scientists, planners, NGOs, municipalities, and citizens early on helped align different forms of knowledge and ensured that biodiversity concerns entered the city-making process. Finally, the public moments—especially the open-air exhibitions (The Park, 2023; The River, 2024-25) and the panel on the rights of the river as a legal entity — were turning points that translated research into shared public discourse, giving the pilot a clear shape and presence.

One major challenge was working within an active urban redevelopment process while advocating for biodiversity. Ecological concerns risked being sidelined by planning regulations, safety requirements, and economic priorities. PAL addressed this by embedding its work directly into the city-



'The River' Sensitive Mapping Sessions



Panel 'On the rights of the river' 2024

CHALLENGES

making context, collaborating closely with municipal actors and planners (Grün Berlin GmbH, Spreepark Art Space) so that biodiversity was discussed as part of ongoing transformation rather than as an external critique.

A second challenge was the gap between scientific knowledge and public engagement. Scientific data alone did not create emotional connection or shared responsibility. PAL responded by translating ecological findings into artistic narratives, multisensory experiences, and participatory formats that made complex processes accessible and relatable.

Another difficulty lay in cross-sector collaboration. Different actors worked with different languages, timelines, and expectations. Establishing Local Coalitions early on, creating regular moments of exchange, and using co-design formats helped align perspectives and build trust.

Finally, engaging citizens meaningfully required moving beyond information-sharing. Sensitive mapping, storytelling, and public exhibitions enabled participants to

reconnect with the site through memory and imagination, fostering long-term engagement and care.

The Berlin pilot generated impact beyond its immediate participants by increasing public awareness, cultural visibility, and cross-sector dialogue around biodiversity in urban transformation. Through the open-air exhibitions and the market of biodiversity (The Park 2023, The River 2024-25), public panels and the biodiversity in action lab at TINCON/re:publica and accessible artistic formats, the project reached a broad audience of local residents, visitors, professionals, decision-makers, and young people (TINCON) many of whom had not previously engaged with biodiversity as a cultural or city-making issue.

Qualitatively, the pilot contributed to a shift in perception: the Spreepark and its river communities of the Spree were increasingly discussed not only as recreational or development sites, but as multispecies ecosystems and shared urban commons. The project strengthened collaboration between cultural actors, environmental

QUALITATIVE
IMPACT

experts, and municipal stakeholders, embedding biodiversity concerns more visibly into regeneration discussions.

The panel on ‘the rights of the river as an ecosystem and legal entity’ extended the project’s impact into policy and legal discourse, connecting local debates to international Nature Rights movements. Overall, the pilot helped position culture-led, participatory approaches as credible tools for biodiversity advocacy and sustainable urban regeneration.

INSIGHTS

A key insight from PAL’s journey is that biodiversity becomes meaningful only when it is experienced, not just explained.

“Biodiversity becomes meaningful only when it is experienced!”

Scientific data is essential, but on its own it rarely creates emotional connection, responsibility, or care. Artistic and sensory approaches are crucial for translating ecological complexity into lived experience.





PAL also learned that urban biodiversity is inseparable from social and cultural contexts. Memories, everyday practices, and power relations strongly shape how people relate to places like the Spreepark and the river and its communities. Addressing ecological challenges therefore requires engaging with cultural narratives and local histories, not only environmental facts.

Another important lesson was the value of early and sustained cross-sector collaboration. Building Local Coalitions from the start helped align different forms of knowledge and prevented biodiversity from being treated as an afterthought in redevelopment processes.

Finally, we learned that giving space to non-human perspectives—even in speculative or artistic ways—can shift human viewpoints and open new conversations about responsibility, cohabitation, and the rights of ecosystems.

At the Berlin pilot site, biodiversity was addressed by recognising the Spreepark and its river landscapes as places of high

CLUSTER:
BIODIVERSITY

but fragile ecological potential shaped by years of abandonment and spontaneous ecological regeneration. The site had developed into a mosaic of habitats—wooded areas, open clearings, water edges, and ruins—supporting a wide range of plant, animal, and microbial life. Our ambition was not to “add” biodiversity through design, but to make existing ecological processes visible, valued, and connected to the wider urban ecology of Berlin, especially through the river as a linking corridor between habitats.

The project focused on strengthening relationships between human and non-human inhabitants by shifting perception and behaviour. Through sensitive mapping, sense-in-place walks, citizen science, and artistic observation tools, participants were invited to experience the site from non-human perspectives—listening to plants, following animal movement patterns, or engaging with soil and water as living systems.

These practices functioned as informal rituals of attention and care, slowing down movement, encouraging listening, and

fostering respect for more-than-human presence. Spatial interventions were intentionally light and temporary, allowing existing habitats to remain undisturbed while creating moments of encounter and reflection rather than permanent infrastructure.

Culture-led strategies played a central role in this process. Artistic narratives, performative mapping scenarios, public exhibitions, and collective storytelling translated complex ecological relationships into shared experiences that could be felt rather than only understood intellectually. These approaches helped bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and everyday perception, encouraging emotional connection, curiosity, and responsibility. As a result, biodiversity became a common reference point for dialogue between citizens, cultural actors, and planners. Rather than measuring success solely through ecological indicators, the project demonstrated that cultural engagement can be a powerful driver of ecological awareness, laying the groundwork for long-term care, inclusive stewardship, and a



deeper understanding of urban ecosystems as shared, living commons.

In ten years, PAL would like this initiative to be applied as a model for integrating biodiversity into urban regeneration through culture. Its lasting contribution would be to show that culture-led, participatory approaches can make ecological complexity visible, meaningful, and actionable within city-making processes.

LOOKING 10
YEARS AHEAD

PAL hopes that Spreepark Art Space will still continue to integrate sensitive mapping and experimental cartography in their educational programme as recognised methodologies that bridge art, ecology, and urban planning—methods that complement scientific data by adding emotional, social, and cultural dimensions. It should become a model to be adopted by other cultural institutions, municipalities, and educational programmes as standard tools for addressing biodiversity and climate challenges.

For the local community, the legacy would be a long-term ‘culture of care’ for places

like the Spreepark and the River Spree and Elbe, where citizens see themselves as co-inhabitants alongside non-human life.

Ultimately, PAL wants the project to contribute to a shift in values—towards recognising urban ecosystems as shared commons with rights, agency, and voices of their own.



Susa Pop is curator, cultural entrepreneur, lecturer and artistic director and co-founder of Public Art Lab, the Urban Media Art Academy and the Connecting Cities Network. Having originally studied Design at the University of Arts, Berlin and EU Cultural Management, she is interested in curating translocal networks / scenarios and creative city-making platforms through urban media art which foster digital placemaking, community building and citizen science at the intersection of urban planning, creative technologies, science and economies





Liepāja

KAROSTA: FROM BEAST TO BEAUTY

In Karosta, a former Soviet military district covering a third of Liepāja where ruins and rare dune biotopes coexist, a local coalition challenged the stigma of a place residents call both dangerous and beautiful. Through Nature Service Stations at city festivals, biodegradable artworks along the Freedom Trail, and sensory mapping with seniors, youth, and scientists, the pilot reframed Karosta's identity, positioning its overlooked ecosystems as a shared cultural and utilitarian resource for the whole city.

The focus of the Liepāja pilot project has been to challenge the stigma surrounding Karosta, a former military district. This area is still characterized by numerous vacant and deteriorating Soviet and Russian Imperial military buildings. By organizing sensory mapping activities, artist residencies, and pop-up exhibitions during local festivals in the warm seasons of 2023–2025—following nature's cycles—the

Karosta is a wondrous, paradoxical and unique place not only in the context of Latvia, but also in the historical and architectural context of the world. Karosta is the largest historical military garrison in the Baltics and constitutes almost a third of Liepāja's territory.

It was planned as a completely autonomous area with its own infrastructure, electric power station, water supply system, church and schools. Under the Soviet occupation regime it was a closed territory, not even accessible to local civilians. The last soldiers of the Soviet army left Liepāja only in 1994.

liepaja.lv

Liepāja municipality and the project's creative team have cultivated a new narrative for the district. This new perspective emphasizes the unique ecosystem services provided for free by the local biodiversity, offering both resources and inspiration to every guest and multispecies inhabitant. The local coalition's quote has served as the project's motto: "From Beast to Beauty."

STARTING POINT

Karosta, a district built for military purposes, has transitioned from a restricted Soviet-era zone into a district of industrial growth among decaying historical heritage. Despite covering a third of the city, it faces social stigma, coastal erosion, and a lack of recreational spaces for social gathering and cultural activities. Part of Liepāja residents consider Karosta to be a dangerous place, and visitors go there for ruin tourism. However, its mesmerising natural landscapes—including dune ecosystems and rare mire biotopes—offer untapped potential which alligns more with the self-image of the local inhabitants.



military ruins with the narrative of the local ecosystem diversity, we aim to reclaim unused resources for the community. These interventions foster connections between nature and culture, overcoming physical and social barriers.

APPROACH

To shift the perception of Karosta from danger and ruins toward beauty and biodiversity, we focused on exploring and promoting the variety of free ecosystem services the area offers. We prioritized culture-led activities and experiences, as locals expressed a dislike for the traditional 'project' format. Sensory mapping activities with the local coalition, seniors, and youth helped to understand if the general public recognizes the ecosystem services around the Freedom Trail territory, and which ones they value most.

“Don’t mention the term ‘project’ when meeting with local inhabitants and youth!”

An artist residency in 2025 resulted in six biodegradable and impermanent artworks on display at the Freedom Trail, to be preserved in augmented reality, revealing the diversity of stories and emotions of the local communities which artists collected during city walks, casual talks, and interviews with nature experts and local inhabitants. The main artistic tool to inspire and record the change of Karosta's public image was a mobile Nature Service Station installed at the largest festivities in Liepāja and Karosta during 2024 and 2025, introducing the diversity of Karosta biotopes and the riches of its ecosystem services, including creative activities for its visitors.

A meeting with the local coalition and local youth in 2023 led to the realization that the biggest challenges in Karosta are the lack of gathering places, a sense of remoteness, and the stigmatization of the district as a risky social environment. These issues are compounded by coastal erosion, which transforms not only the natural landscape but also the military heritage—the core of the district's identity. This led us to conclude that Karosta's image must switch its focus

KEY
MOMENTS +
REGIONS



from what is degrading (military ruins) to that which is growing (biodiversity).

The vast abandoned territories were a primary reason for Karosta's inclusion in a Special Economic Zone for industrial development. However, an environment expert from the Liepāja Nature House introduced the creative team to the concept of ecosystem services, emphasizing the economic, utilitarian, and cultural value of biodiversity in an urban context.

The 2023–2024 sensory mapping results informed our development of multisensory art activities, highlighting the immersive and multimodal nature of Karosta's ecosystem.

Legislation for the Liepāja pilot activities and the inclusion of policymakers in the local coalition was not an issue, as the pilot was executed by a municipal department. However, engaging local communities in activities at a remote location was more challenging. Public participation in Liepāja is universally low; for instance, only 28% of inhabitants voted in the municipal elections in 2021. To engage local communities, we approached community leaders, placed our activities within larger local public

CHALLENGES

gatherings, and provided transport and light catering for the attendees of the remote events.

Another stimulating challenge when working with the topic of biodiversity is taking more-than-human needs into account. To meet this agenda, we invited artists to use as many biodegradable materials as possible or to produce impermanent interventions, reusing any props multiple times. Our approach followed nature's cycles and seasonality, including more active public engagement on-site during the warm season while letting the site rest during the colder months. Taking biodiversity into account, only limited groups of participants were invited to explore the impermanent art activities in the peripheral "empty" zones of the Karosta Freedom Trail. Meanwhile, large-scale interventions were organized within existing festivals in urban centers to maximize reach without disturbing sensitive habitats.

QUALITATIVE IMPACT

According to its inhabitants, Karosta is a district that lacks visual art experiences and gathering places. Our pilot activities addressed this by adding visual art

elements to existing festivals in Karosta (Karosta Festival, Lāčplēša Garden Festival) and the Liepāja city center (Sea Festival). We are currently disseminating these results through augmented reality for preservation (currently in production), which adds to Karosta's cultural tourism offering.

The Liepāja pilot provided an impulse for local creatives to develop stronger collaborations and a unified Karosta "brand". Local non-governmental organizations have begun collaborating on event production and project applications, while also expanding their international networks. Furthermore, artists from other districts and abroad have shown increased interest in Karosta. In November 2025, the artist organization ASTE. Art, Science, Technology, Education organized an exhibition in the Liepāja city center, inviting artists from the Karosta open-air exhibition to adapt their pieces for a gallery space to reach a broader audience.

The storytelling and research conducted during the Liepāja pilot have contributed to ongoing discussions regarding the development and well-being of this





peripheral district. Consequently, Liepāja 2027 – European Capital of Culture is giving special attention to Karosta in its programming, inviting organizations to develop collaborative urban artwork there. The creative team of the Future DiverCities Liepāja pilot has been approached by Liepāja 2027 curators and partner organizations to share project outcomes, thereby fostering the long-term continuation of its results.

INSIGHTS

Working with the public perception of a place requires navigating ambivalence to accommodate a diversity of stories and opinions within a recognizable narrative. While interviewing the local community of Karosta, we realized how significantly internal perceptions can differ from external ones. Liepāja pilot added new imagery and artworks to represent the current local identity and to expand the public narrative around Karosta district.

Embodying the paradoxes of Liepāja, Karosta—whose name translates to "War Port"—is seen by locals and regular visitors as a retreat for peace and greenery. Furthermore, while a local coalition defined

the project's goal as changing Karosta's image "from beast to beauty," a mapping

"In connection with this project, we visited places that I did not even know existed. Therefore, every day we saw new views, how the nature changes and how insects start to wake up. I liked this open-air project because [inside] it would be much sadder and not such a productive time."

exercise revealed a deeper truth: when asked to mark "dangerous" versus "beautiful" locations, participants identified the exact same places as being both.

Later in the project's development, a biologist noted that the degrading military

infrastructure is not just a symbol of decay, but also one of preservation. The concrete masses have protected the Karosta coastline from erosion, sheltering a multispecies habitat. While this example signifies a fortunate, mutually beneficial relationship between nature and culture, increased awareness of ecological processes can help navigate environmental threats and protect a sustainable, multispecies future.

BIODIVERSITY

The approach of Liepaja pilot is inspired by natural and cultural diversity drive long-term resilience – a system made of many symbiotic elements is more adaptable to changing circumstances – aligning with the New Bauhaus principles of beauty, sustainability, and inclusiveness. By utilizing curated outdoor activities, we fostered emotional bonds and trust between the community and their environment as foundation to sustainable urban development. We identified already active yet unrecognised use of ecosystem services in Karosta undeveloped territories, especially by under-resourced inhabitants, and popularised it through culture-led activities as an example of the economic



and cultural benefit from biodiversity preservation in urban context. The implementation was structured around three strategic pillars:

Inclusiveness: Local organizations, scientists, and community groups (from youth to seniors) collaborate in workshops to map the area's identity and prototype development scenarios.

Beauty: Artists used biodegradable materials or repeated application of produced elements, and non-material practices—like sound art and AR—to highlight environmental fragility and the moral considerations behind the perception of beauty.

Sustainability: The project introduced “Nature Service Stations” which popularised the concept of ecosystem services and reciprocal exchange, where humans perform beneficial actions for the environment in return for the ecosystem resources they consume.

The multisensory approach to both data-gathering and artistic interventions



Future
River
Lithuania



Latvian
River
Festival

Latvian River Festival
SOMJAS PIEKRASTE
0-8 g/l

Latvian River Festival
SOMJAS PIEKRASTE
0-8 g/l

Latvian River Festival
SOMJAS PIEKRASTE
0-6 g/l

Latvian River Festival
LATVIJAS PIEKRASTE
6-8 g/l



emphasized the importance of embodied perception in fostering interspecies connection and an appreciation of the mutual benefit that human and non-human actors provide to each other. Goggles altering colour perception, underwater sound recordings, augmented reality experiences, olfactory recordings, and other forms of art provided an alternative vision of the local environment, inspiring an empathetic attitude towards the needs of other species.

Our findings underscore biodiversity's importance to the local community. By adopting an ecosystem services approach, residents can better preserve their environment while facing industrial growth—transforming Karosta's reputation from one of ruins and danger to one of nature- and culture-led well-being.



Anna Priedola is a transdisciplinary artist and cultural producer from Liepāja, Latvia. Her work blends art, food, and data to explore social issues and narratives of marginalised groups through taste, texture, and participation – for example, those of dementia patients and their caregivers in the exhibition and workshop series “Dairy Diaries. Dementia in Stories and Statistics”. Using the multisensory language of food, she creates experiences that foster connection, dialogue, and inclusion.

Anna teaches at the RTU Liepāja Centre of Humanitarian Sciences and Arts, where she directs the BA program “New Media Art and Design.” She is also a creative producer for “Liepāja 2027 – European Capital of Culture.”

AMZCM-HZOX



Zagreb

KONTEJNER: A VIBRANT PLACE OF SHARED ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE

In September 2023, KONTEJNER opened an exhibition and performance venue within the old and dilapidated printing complex of the former newspaper Vjesnik in Zagreb, Croatia. With its diverse artistic, educational, and discursive programme activities, it has become a hub for creativity and interdisciplinary collaboration.

By inaugurating a vibrant place of shared artistic experience, KONTEJNER has created a platform for artists and creatives where they can showcase their work, develop new projects, host workshops and residencies, and engage in educational activities. Within Future DiverCities, KONTEJNER has been focused on showcasing, producing and interpreting an array of investigative, interdisciplinary and intermedia cultural programmes with a special emphasis on the topic of bio-art, bio-

KONTEJNER is a non-profit NGO from Zagreb, Croatia, founded in 2002. and engaged in curatorial work, organization of art festivals, public cultural events, artwork production, education, publishing and social theory.

Their main field of interest is progressive contemporary intermedia art, sound art and experimental music, with special emphasis on projects investigating the role and meaning of science, technology, and the body in our society, as well as relevant and current phenomena, provocative and intriguing subjects, and those perceived by the society as taboos.

kontejner.org

media and artistic practices dealing with living organisms.

STARTING POINT

KONTEJNER has been working on opening and managing an experimental venue for contemporary arts and culture for almost 10 years. This was a strategic goal for the organisation embedded into the Future DiverCities project from the very beginning, and it was furthermore reinforced by the local situation in Zagreb where spaces for contemporary culture are scarce.

The Zagreb biodiversity pilot therefore focused on one industrial complex in the southern part of the city, next to an important avenue connecting the eastern and western part of the city. This complex is well known under the name of Vjesnik since it was the site of a successful former Yugoslavian (and later Croatian) daily newspaper company Vjesnik (1940-2012). This newspaper and publishing company, that also included a large print house area, was situated in this industrial complex in Zagreb, counting more than 30.000 m² of space. During its peak years in the 1980s, the printhouse of this media giant produced over 267 million copies of different

publications, with tens of millions distributed internationally, and over 1600 selling spots in the region. In the 1980s, around 6000 people worked in Vjesnik. In 2019, this number was around 200.

In the southern base building, KONTEJNER has rented out a total of 257m² with the goal to revitalise and transform the area into a temporary testing ground where they have piloted several new activities and formats, addressing at the same time the challenge of bottom up, low-cost reuse of large empty urban areas – from establishing a new cultural venue for the city and the European creative community, to showcasing the best of contemporary bio-artistic practices and engaging new partners and stakeholders into the project.

During the revitalization and renovation process of the rented pilot site, KONTEJNER has invited local artists, designers, technicians, and other professionals active in the local art scene to contribute their expertise in rebuilding this new space. A very important element of the revitalization was to build a creative

APPROACH

community around the new location. Since the very beginning of the organisation, KONTEJNER has placed a strong emphasis on stimulating cooperation among local artists and creatives of various profiles (artistic, scientific, tech, IT etc.), in order to create an extensive network of partners and collaborators. Likewise, with the inauguration of the new venue, the artists and creatives now have access to a platform where they can work and showcase their projects, meet peers and engage in different activities.

In order to strengthen the connections with local collaborators that KONTEJNER has been building, they have involved them in the programme, including the sensory mapping workshops that aimed to both explore the spatial context that we now inhabit and to foster the attachments of collaborators to the new space.

KEY
MOMENTS +
DECISIONS

Since the pilot site was a new venue in Zagreb, very early on in the project KONTEJNER has decided not to approach the biodiversity aspect of the project too literal and to investigate the site as a biodiverse system, but rather to focus on



Opening of KONTEJNER venue

and bio-media topics to the venue and to create programmes that integrate the theme critically into the site and its surroundings. Every presented project included a workshop, artist talk or presentation in order to open up the addressed topics and make them understandable to a wider audience, especially the neighbourhood and its diverse community where the pilot site is located.

Another important thing for our organisation was from the very beginning not to focus solely on the pilot site that has been revitalised and activated, but to understand it as a basis for a potential transitory usage of space in the wider area of the Vjesnik complex. Our goal was to establish a starting point in the new space we have rented and renovated, and then try to activate other zones around it with specific temporary artistic and cultural activities. The sensitive mapping workshops have significantly improved KONTEJNER's experience and understanding of the spatial context that surrounds the pilot site. By exploring the Vjesnik complex through mapping exercises, KONTEJNER has gained valuable insight into the specific

characteristics of this space. A better understanding of the context in which we operate allows us to tailor and prepare even more thoughtfully designed activities that are better aligned with the unique qualities of the environment. Having gained this knowledge and perspective, the organization created programs that resonate even more deeply with our community, while simultaneously building a stronger rapport to the space and its changing landscape.

Going into the project, we knew that the asset structure of the Vjesnik complex is very complicated. Although the KONTEJNER venue is rented from a private owner, the majority of the 30.000m² complex is owned by the Croatian government. Gaining access into different parts of the complex wasn't always easy and there are no defined rules on who to approach. But the biggest challenge yet happened in November 2025 when the landmark skyscraper, around which the whole complex was built, burned down. For two months KONTEJNER didn't have access to its venue since it was closed off

CHALLENGES



Artist talk by Nathan Thompson about bio-sonic installation 'cellF'

at KONTEJNER 2025 © Zoe Šarlija

by the police department. Things are slowly getting better, with plans to tear down the skyscraper. Unfortunately, the future of the whole complex is very uncertain and currently we don't have a possibility to further explore or activate other parts of the complex for our programme activities.

The Zagreb pilot generated impact beyond its direct participants and community by revitalizing part of the Vjesnik complex and turning it into a now recognized cultural point in Zagreb. Besides KONTEJNER venue, a design, woodwork, and metalwork studio with whom KONTEJNER collaborated on the renovation of the venue, decided to move into the same complex and establish their practice right next to KONTEJNER.

This move was motivated by their collaboration with KONTEJNER in this specific location and it highlights the organic growth of our DIY community. Their relocation and practice within the same complex highlights the relationship we have cultivated and allows us to plan our future activities more easily and with a more pronounced and organically created inter-

QUALITATIVE
IMPACT

sectoral perspective. The studio is now actively involved in most of our projects and program activities – the renovation of the space has organically led to exhibition setups and artwork productions. And the studio is getting more and more recognition for their own practices widening at the same time their target clientele and audience.

Next to KONTEJNER venue are the offices of a well-known architectural studio from Zagreb that renovated their space at the same time as we did. So, the public has recognized that there has been a shift in the Vjesnik complex, that once run down buildings have slowly been revitalized with new and different content. We hope that there will be more opportunities in the future to house cultural and creative content on this vast complex site and that we will inspire more peers and colleagues to embark on this challenge.

INSIGHTS

The on-going collaborations that we had with different stakeholders show that KONTEJNER's renovated venue and the Vjesnik complex are not just inert physical spaces but living entities and also dynamic centres of artistic and social activity. They



can be continuously redefined and explored by different creative communities that have been growing and evolving alongside the organization for years. The different activities and the importance of including the local coalition directly in the research and creative process was once again highlighted. One of the takeaways from working at the Zagreb pilot site is the realization that it is crucial to actively work with the history of the place that we are now a part of, unearthing its layers to better understand it and discover its full potential and its place in the ecology of the neighbourhood, and even further – the entire city.

Likewise, creating less ‘conventional’ maps such as smell and sound maps that were part of the sensitive mapping workshops, offer a unique and profound way to experience and understand a place. Unlike standard archival data that give us a more detached and factographic account, sensitive mapping engages the senses and allows people to connect with a physical place on a visceral and emotional level. The scents as well as sounds bring forth memories and emotions. The sounds can



also say a lot about the atmosphere and the 'feeling' of the space. This approach really can help deepen our relationship with the space and the environment that we inhabit.

LOOKING 10 YEARS AHEAD

We hope that in 10 years ahead KONTEJNER is still a vibrant space for different artistic experiences in Zagreb and that it remains an integral part of its neighbourhood and community. We hope that we will be able to further successfully implement different mapping projects in close collaboration with the student but also the academic community. The goal is to use less conventional and more empiric and exciting out-of-the-box academic and pedagogical approaches aimed at building a community and treating the participants as partners in the shaping and continuous (re)creating of our space and the surrounding landscape.

We hope that the complicated and sad history of the Vjesnik complex will not transfer also into its future and that the Croatian government has the strength and courage to transform it into a landmark cultural site like La Friche in Marseille and



Opening of exhibition by Silvio Vujičić 'SKIN(S)CARE' 2025 © Ivan Buvinčić



Community project Bacteria Babies by Katja Banović and Xavier Madden 2024

© Courtesy of artists

not to give in to the construction lobby to turn it into another apartment-shopping site.

The goal of the Zagreb pilot site was to revitalize an unused space and to activate

BIODIVERSITY

“... it shows how KONTEJNER’s bioart programs aren’t just art for art’s sake, but also have a social and environmental impact.”

it with specific temporary artistic and cultural activities that interpret an array of investigative, interdisciplinary and intermedia cultural programmes with a special emphasis on the topic of bio-art, biomedica and artistic practices dealing with living organisms. The biodiversity approach therefore was not literal in the investigation of the site as a biodiverse system, but in showcasing artists dealing with the current biodiversity, inter-species and biomedica topics and creating programmes that integrate the theme critically into the site

and its surroundings. This approach is especially directed towards the audience, activating the neighborhood in a participatory manner.

The 'Bacteria Babies' bio-art research and production project that took place from April 2023 to February 2024 is an example on how projects at KONTEJNER involve the local communities and focus on DIY bio-art and science experiments that participants can also conduct at their homes. During the final project event, the 'Bacteria Babies: Sip & See' exhibition and 'Adopt a baby kombucha' event in February 2024 at KONTEJNER, many visitors and organization partners and collaborators took home kombucha growing kits to continue developing their bio-art experiments at home. Some of the students that grew their own kombucha also produced bacterial celluloses, and then showcased (at their own initiative) the celluloses at an exhibition event organized by the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb.

Through sensitive mapping workshops, one on one talks with artists, citizen science tools and interactive artistic experiences,

KONTEJNER's participants and community have been invited to learn about different aspects and approaches of cohabitation of living beings on Earth. Inspired, on the one hand, by latest scientific research, and the imaginings of posthuman subjectivity, as well as political and ethical assessments about the future on the other, works presented at KONTEJNER frequently venture into exciting and experimental theories by addressing issues such as pollution, interspecies communication, climate change, the posthuman body and the Anthropocene. Armed with the potential for social transformation, they deliver an effective impact on their audience and encourage discussion. Through different programme activities participants were invited to think and talk about their own visions and narratives, thus integrating the long-disconnected notions of nature and the human.



Tereza Teklić holds MA degrees in Art History and German Language and Literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. Since 2008 she has worked as a coordinator, project manager, and curator at KONTEJNER, and in that capacity has realized and curated numerous exhibitions and festivals in Croatia and internationally (Zagreb, Rijeka, Dubrovnik, Prague, Montreal, and beyond). From 2011 to 2018 she was part of the curatorial team of Mochvara Gallery and the production platform Sound Art Incubator, both collaborative projects with the Culture Development Association and Mochvara Club, Zagreb. Since 2019 she has been the project manager and curator of the EU project EMAP – European Media Art Platform, an international network of residencies for emerging media artists.



Bio-sonic installation and performance 'cellF' by Guy Ben-Ary, Nathan Thompson, Darren Moore, Andrew Fitch and Stuart Hodgetts at KONTEJNER 2025 © Ivan Buvinić



Opening of KONTEJNER venue 2023 © Sanja Bistričić Srića



COMMONING

To understand the commoning concept, it is necessary to first look at the concept of the commons. The commons describe the cultural and ecological shared resources, which can vary from the most simple ones—such as air, water, or even the sunshine—to the ones described in this publication such as a shared beehive or eco-inspired structure to hide from the rain. *Commoning* then refers to the process of shifting a resource from being useful to an individual to being shared and enjoyed by the collective.

Within the context of *Future DiverCities*, commoning was understood as a critical tool for building inclusive urban ecologies. The projects in this cluster emphasised cooperation over ownership, and process over fixed outcomes. They created spaces for negotiation, mutual care, and collective responsibility, thereby challenging dominant models of top-down urban development.

By fostering shared stewardship, these initiatives contributed not only to social cohesion but also to more sustainable and resilient forms of spatial use. Commoning practices enabled communities to actively shape their environments, embedding ecological awareness within everyday actions and decision-making processes. In doing so, they expanded the role of culture as a facilitator of both social and environmental transformation.



Konepää from outside © Akseli Muraja

KUOPIO

CULTURE WORKSHOP KONEPAJA – HOME FOR ARTS, URBAN CULTURE, AND CIVIC DEMOCRACY

The Culture Workshop Konepaja was located in a historical railway property – in a district near the city centre of Kuopio, and offered a unique environment for local people to create, organise, and take part in arts, local democracy, and ecological urban change-making.

The Kuopio pilot, located in the unused, former train workshop, promoted participation, civic action, and local democracy as well as ecological change-making. The ANTI Festival worked with the locals through the Konepaja Community (Local Coalition) since September 2022 to co-design the pilot space and its activities.

Since March 2024, the ANTI Festival coordinated and facilitated the activities at Konepaja, in the form of three clusters:

ANTI – Contemporary Art Festival is an international contemporary arts festival presenting site-specific works annually in September in Kuopio, Finland.

In addition to the festival, ANTI is a versatile art organisation whose work also includes facilitating art and the work of artists around the year thanks to various partnership projects.

antifestival.com

1 – activities curated by ANTI Festival, 2 – activities designed and organised by the Konepaja Community, freelance artists and creatives, and activists, and 3 – activities organised by local companies and cultural associations or collectives.

STARTING POINT

Konepaja is the name of an exciting historical industrial property that has inspired artists and creatives in Kuopio for decades. It is an unused property that was built for the use of the state railway company. The first buildings at the property were built in 1932, and were the workplace for dozens of people until the railway company closed it down in 2002. Since then, the spaces have been used for small industry and woodwork education, and most local people have rejected the area.

Konepaja is located in the middle of the rapidly changing neighbourhood of Männistö-Itkonniemi, which will be under development of infrastructure, public transport, and housing over the next 20 years. However, the Konepaja property currently has no urban plan, and its future remains unclear.

The spaces of Konepaja have been used for single events by ANTI Festival and other cultural organisers over the past 10 years. Still, the majority of the property has remained empty. At the same time, the artists, creatives, and urban activists in Kuopio lack working spaces, venues, and dedicated spaces for citizen-led cultural activity.

The Kuopio pilot was set to bring together these two challenges in the city: the lack of working spaces as well as filling up the empty but inspiring space near the city centre.

APPROACH

To meet these challenges, the ANTI Festival rented a 336m² indoor space and a 400m² yard at the Konepaja property for the use of the pilot activity. The space was suitable for performing artists' rehearsals, workshops, and other smaller gatherings, or larger events.

We aimed to make the Culture Workshop Konepaja a shared community space rather than only a venue for artistic activities, and this truly happened.

“A home for arts,
urban culture and civic
democracy!”

Our strategy was to facilitate different types of activities; in addition to the artistic interventions curated by the ANTI Festival, we encouraged and supported activities designed and organised by the Konepaja Community, freelance artists and creatives, and activists. We also promoted activities organised by local companies, cultural associations, and collectives.

KEY
MOMENTS +
DECISIONS

When we organised the first co-design workshop for the local community in the autumn 2022, the invitation to come and plan the future of Konepaja gathered more participants than we expected. It was clear that this particular space interests and inspires local people enormously.



A Piece of Space: 106 Assembly, created by the artist Tea Andreoletti and the Konepaja Community © Akseli Muraja



Since the pilot space was in the middle of a rapidly changing location, the upcoming development plans of the area were a big part of what inspired us to focus on this particular neighborhood.

The curatorial strategy of facilitating three types of activities that supported each other in the pilot space was developed in the spring of 2023 after a few co-design workshops with the community. We listened to the needs of the community and bridged them with our artistic mission and the aims of the Future DiverCities 2 project.

The property owner never had (and still doesn't have) a solid plan for the property. Because of this, the rental agreement we signed didn't include our ideal long-term timeframe. However, we managed to negotiate for a long-term use of 1,5 years before we signed the agreement.

CHALLENGES

We worked with the local coalition over a series of workshops in 2022 and 2023, and through weekly meetings in 2024, before we found the right rhythm for the coalition's gatherings. The co-design workshops were

facilitated by FEMMA Planning, an urban planning collective focused on participatory processes. Finally, in 2025, all elements worked smoothly at the Culture Workshop Konepaja. The community gathered once a month and, in addition, came together in a series of year-round workshops leading to the artistic highlight of the pilot, *A Piece of Space: 106 Hours Assembly*, conceptualised and directed by the artist Tea Andreoletti.

As Kuopio lacks a grassroots-level culture space, one of our challenges was to manage the expectations of the community. The Future DiverCities 2 pilots were planned to take over empty spaces temporarily. How to satisfy the community with something temporary when they are hungry for a permanent space?

QUALITATIVE IMPACT

The Culture Workshop Konepaja created visibility to the need for cultural spaces and venues in Kuopio and pointed out the potential of the former railway property. It participated in the public discussion on this topic and offered a temporary resting place for the artists and creatives who have been

fighting for these types of workspaces for decades. The City of Kuopio co-funded the Future DiverCities 2 project, but was not ready to contribute to the continuation plan that the ANTI Festival and the community had prepared for Konepaja.

Nevertheless, the pilot definitely forced the local decision makers, city officers, and politicians to listen to the needs of the artists and other citizens.

Konepaja also brought together the fragmented field of different advocates for social and environmental justice in the city. It brought together artists and creatives as well as urban, environmental and human rights activists. Konepaja became a common part of life for people from different backgrounds, and a home to the local democracy movement in Kuopio.

“Weird, wonderful,
way out!”

The members of the Konepaja community became advocates for more sustainable and participatory urban planning, greener city, more working spaces for local artists,



A Piece of Space: 106 Assembly, created by the artist Tea Andreoletti and the Konepaja Community © Akseli Muraja

and for more citizen-led urban culture in Kuopio.

The broader conditions we had to navigate during this project included, first and foremost, the absence of structural support from the City of Kuopio. Secondly, the property owner's aims didn't match our aims. And lastly, the Finnish bureaucracy and restrictions.

INSIGHTS

When it comes to managing expectations of the community, it's important to communicate realistic resources to the community from the beginning. As Kuopio is lacking cultural spaces, the community expected an equipped and highly functional venue from the ANTI Festival - yet the aims and budget of the Future DiverCities 2 project were targeting temporary use and community facilitation through artistic interventions.

One of our important insights is that hosting a *community* in a space is more important than the *physical space*. The space of Konepaja has been a huge inspiration to many local people, but in the end of the

pilot, we know that the people matter more than the walls.

CLUSTER:
COMMONING

The first stage of the Kuopio pilot, in 2022 and 2023, prioritised local community building. The artistic interventions took form as community-building activities through which the pilot was reaching out to new audiences towards the Future DiverCities 2 project and the pilot space.

In 2023, ANTI Festival produced a festival programme that was firmly connected to the aims of our Future DiverCities pilot. Since we didn't have full access to the Konepaja space yet, the programme was presented partly at Konepaja and partly at other venues and sites in Kuopio. The official ANTI Festival pre-party took place from September 8-9 in 2023, and the festival dates were September 12-17 in 2023.

The next stage of the pilot highlighted one larger-scale artistic intervention parallel to coordinating and facilitating the Konepaja Community, the citizen-led activities, and the other cultural activities and events taking place at Konepaja.





Spheres of Care, created by Wauhaus & Alisa Talja © Akseli Muraja

The space was truly taken over by the community. The Konepaja Community gathered on a weekly basis from May 2024 on to plan and implement citizen-led activities such as flea markets and events for children, which have both been very popular among the local people.

Also, local artists and activists have found the space and organised their own events in the space. Local associations and private companies/people have also sub-rented the space for their private events.

After participating in the project pilot at the Culture Workshop Konepaja, the local community members now have tools to organise themselves for similar civic action, to share skills and knowledge, and even to run a grassroots-level cultural space.

We now know that such a cultural space is possible for our city too, even if we didn't succeed in sustaining its future, since the use of empty spaces in Finland is generally quite bureaucratic and restricted.

LOOKING 10
YEARS AHEAD



A Piece of Space: 106 Assembly, created by the artist
Tea Andreoletti and the Konepaja Community © Akseli Muraja



KONEPAJAN UTOPIA JA DYSTOPIA

Teot kahti utopiaa
Milloin Sainnointi
Dystopias Sainnointi



The Cultural Workshop Konepaja is closed, but the Konepaja community continues its activity through monthly meetings and organising events in other spaces and contexts of the city, such as during the annual ANTI Festival. Our aim is that, in 10 years, the City of Kuopio will have opened a similar space with better infrastructure and even more possibilities.



Elisa Itkonen is a Curator and Producer in contemporary arts. Her work concentrates on site-specific contemporary art, public art, and performance. She creates concepts, enables projects, and curates international events - working in close collaboration with multidisciplinary contemporary artists. From 2015 to 2022, she was working as the Festival Manager of ANTI – Contemporary Art Festival, and in 2022, she was appointed as the Director - Lead Curator of the festival. One of her key ambitions is to participate in building an economically, socially, and ecologically more sustainable art field, and in promoting accessibility of art.





The "Mega Pic Nic" as seen from the ski, namely the big blanket that was saw by the women from the neighbourhood © Hugo Bouguin

Marseille

CULTIVATING COMMON GROUND: CO-DESIGNING A SHARED GARDEN

In the heart of a dense residential area in Marseille, a modest garden becomes a testing ground for commoning practices. Through co-design, slow engagement, and shared care, residents, artists, and local organisations explored how a space can be collectively reclaimed and shaped over time.

Le Jardin de Crimée is a small garden located within a residential complex in Marseille, primarily used by families living nearby. Within Future DiverCities, the garden became a pilot site to experiment with commoning practices through a culture-led, co-design approach. Rather than starting from physical transformation, the project focused on community activation, shared governance, and the gradual reappropriation of the space by its users.

La Friche la Belle de Mai functions both as a daily workspace for around 70 resident organisations—bringing together 400 artists and creative professionals—and as a vibrant platform for cultural dissemination and events. Each year, it hosts approximately 600 public art events, ranging from youth workshops to large-scale festivals. Welcoming over 450,000 visitors annually, La Friche la Belle de Mai stands as a dynamic and multifaceted public space, combining artistic production with wide-reaching cultural engagement.

lafriche.org

With the support of the collectives, Terrains Vagues and Pépins Production, the initiative unfolded as a long-term process rooted in listening, presence, and collaboration with local residents and associations.

Workshops, informal gatherings, and seasonal activities were used to understand existing uses, desires, and constraints linked to the garden. By working within the existing social and ecological ecosystem, the project positioned the garden as a common resource shaped through collective care rather than imposed design. The pilot highlights how *commoning* can emerge through time, relationships, and shared practices, laying the groundwork for future physical interventions grounded in community ownership.

STARTING POINT

The Marseille pilot addressed the challenge of how to activate a shared space in a socially diverse residential context without imposing predefined uses or top-down solutions. Although the garden already existed, it was underused by certain segments of the local population and lacked a collectively defined role. Usage was

largely limited to children and their mothers living in the adjacent housing complex, while other groups—such as teenagers, young adults, and fathers—were noticeably absent.

The core challenge was therefore not spatial degradation, but the absence of shared governance, collective imagination, and inclusive participation. The project sought to avoid treating the garden as a neutral public space or a finished infrastructure, and instead approached it as a potential common: a space whose meaning, rules, and future would need to be negotiated collectively. This required time, trust-building, and methods capable of engaging residents as co-authors rather than beneficiaries, while navigating existing social dynamics, rhythms, and constraints within the neighbourhood.

The response to this challenge was a bottom-up, co-design methodology centered on commoning practices rather than immediate physical transformation. Terrains Vagues and Pépins Production positioned themselves as mediators, working to

APPROACH



The final event in the garden: the "Méga Pic Nic" © Hugo Bougouin



Cité qui se passe

Mouvement MOHAMED

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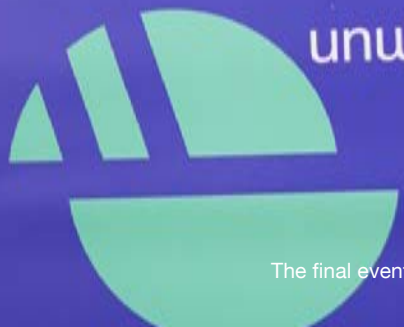
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Future Diversities

Jardin commun



Co-funded by the European Union

10 rue de la République

SNCF

Partners: ABB, Labège, Sarcelle

The final event in the garden: the "Méga Pic Nic" © Hugo Bougouin

facilitate community reappropriation of the garden rather than defining its future in advance. The approach prioritised presence, listening, and progressive engagement over visible outputs.

“My favorite memory is when we were together, chatting during sewing workshops and at lunchtime.”

Activities included informal meetings, shared meals, exploratory workshops, mapping exercises, and seasonal gardening and ethnobotanical practices. These moments allowed residents to gradually take ownership of the space, articulate desires, and identify obstacles together. The project was developed in close coordination with existing local actors, including residents' associations and organisations already active in the area, ensuring alignment with ongoing initiatives and everyday uses of the site.

By embedding the project within the existing social and ecological ecosystem of the garden, the pilot established a framework where commoning could emerge through shared care, collective decision-making, and repeated encounters over time.

A first crucial decision was to treat the initial phase as a theoretical and relational stage rather than a construction phase. This choice made it possible to focus on community activation and co-design before any physical intervention, acknowledging that commoning requires social foundations.

KEY
MOMENTS +
DECISIONS

Another defining moment was the decision to align the project calendar with local events and associations' activities, notably using existing festivals and gatherings as entry points to meet residents and introduce the project. This helped anchor the initiative in familiar rhythms rather than creating parallel dynamics.

Seasonal workshops—such as botanical walks and ethnobotanical activities using plants already present in the garden—also played a key role. These practices



During the "Méga Pic Nic", mums and women from the neighbourhood met to discuss the future of the garden © Hugo Bougouin



During the "Mega Pic Nic", mums and women from the neighbourhood met to discuss the future of the garden © Hugo Bouguin

connected human and non-human dimensions of the site while offering accessible, hands-on ways for residents to engage. Together, these moments helped shift the garden from a passive space into a shared process of exploration and collective imagination.

CHALLENGES

One major challenge was maintaining horizontal governance while engaging a wide range of voices. Ensuring inclusivity required time and careful facilitation, as not all residents had the same availability, confidence, or expectations regarding participation. Rather than forcing consensus, the project embraced gradual engagement and multiple entry points.

Another challenge was the uneven presence of different demographic groups. As mentioned before, while children and mothers were highly present, young adults and fathers were largely absent during early activations. This highlighted the need to adapt formats, schedules, and outreach strategies over time to broaden participation.

Finally, working without immediate physical outcomes required managing expectations from both residents and institutional frameworks. This was addressed by clearly framing the first phase as a co-design and commoning process, where the main outcome was the strengthening of relationships, shared understanding, and collective capacity to act together.

Qualitatively, the pilot contributed to redefining the garden as a shared resource rather than a residual green space. Through repeated collective activities, the project strengthened social ties between residents and local organisations, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and care.

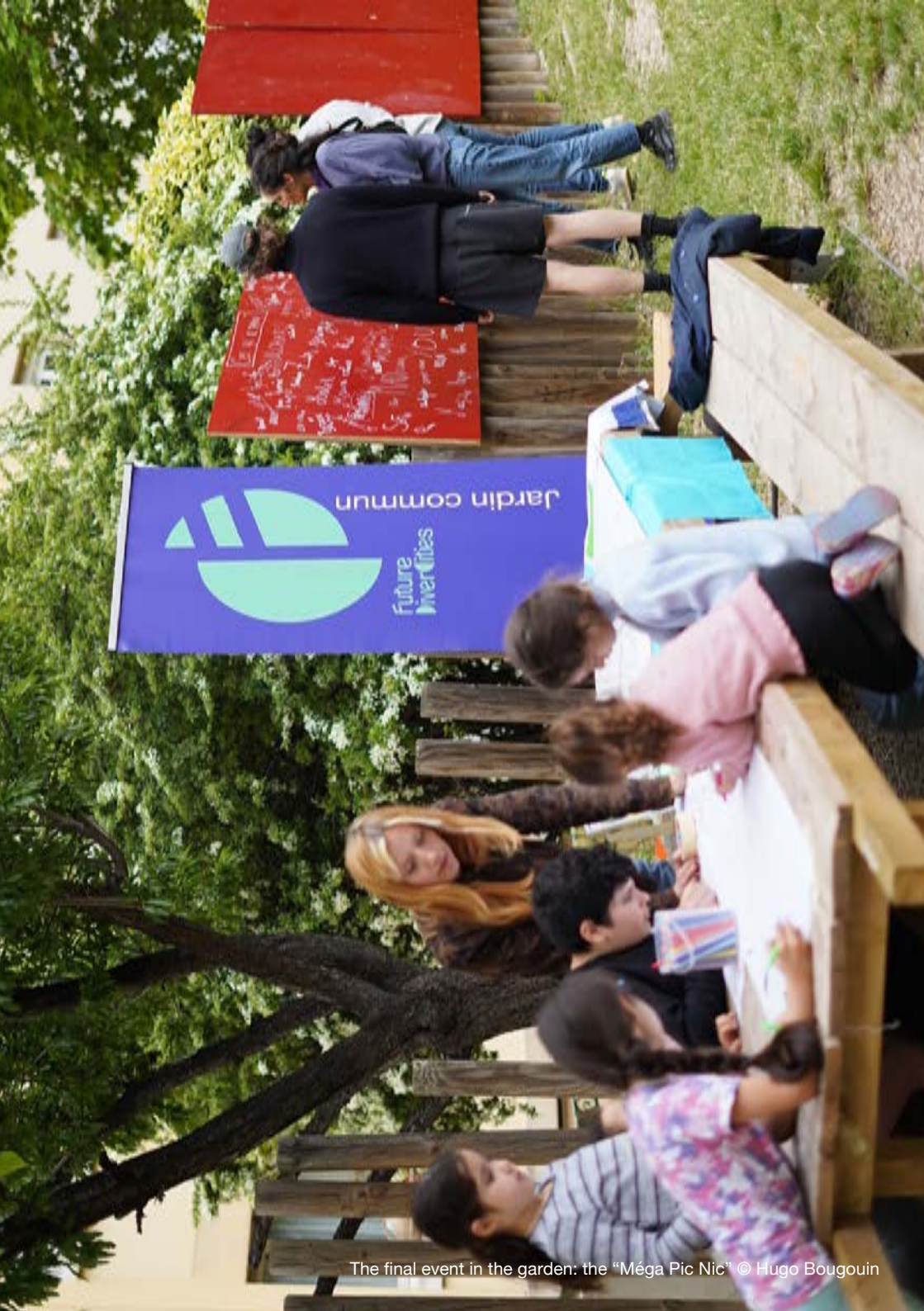
QUALITATIVE
IMPACT

“My best memory is
when we did
construction activities”

The approach also demonstrated an alternative model for culture-led urban action in Marseille: one that values slowness, mediation, and co-design over immediate visibility. By foregrounding



The final event in the garden: the "Méga Pic Nic" © Hugo Bouguin



The final event in the garden: the "Méga Pic Nic" © Hugo Bougouin

residential contexts where physical intervention alone would be insufficient or premature.

Beyond direct participants, the project reinforced the role of cultural actors as facilitators of collective processes, capable of working within existing ecosystems and supporting inclusive urban ecologies. Its impact lies less in transformation of form than in transformation of relationships and governance imaginaries.

INSIGHTS

One key insight from the Marseille pilot is that commoning cannot be rushed or reduced to physical outcomes. Shared spaces do not become commons through design alone, but through time, repeated encounters, and the gradual building of trust. The first phase showed that community activation is already a form of impact, even when no material transformation is yet visible.

Another important lesson concerns the role of cultural actors. Acting as mediators, rather than project leaders, allowed our local coalition to support collective processes without imposing solutions. This

position requires patience and constant adaptation, but it proved essential to maintaining horizontal governance and inclusivity.

“This year marks 15 years since I moved into this residence. At the time, there wasn't as much greenery in the garden and there were no structures.”

The project also revealed how participation is uneven and shaped by everyday constraints. While children and mothers were highly present, other groups remained harder to reach, highlighting the need for flexible formats and long-term engagement strategies. Finally, the garden demonstrated that co-design works best when rooted in existing social and ecological ecosystems, building on what is already there rather than starting from a blank slate.

In the long term, the Marseille pilot aspires to leave a legacy of shared stewardship and collective agency. Rather than a finished

LOOKING 10
YEARS AHEAD

garden, the ambition is that residents retain the capacity to shape, adapt, and care for the space together.

The project aims to contribute to a broader shift in how public and semi-public spaces are approached in dense urban contexts: not as services to be delivered, but as commons to be co-produced. By demonstrating the value of co-design and commoning practices, the pilot offers a model where cultural initiatives support long-term social cohesion and ecological awareness.

Ultimately, its legacy would be a strengthened culture of participation, where residents recognise their role as co-authors of their environment and where institutions acknowledge the importance of time, trust, and mediation in building inclusive urban futures.



Ilaria Bondavalli is a European Project Manager at *Chroniques*, the Biennale of Digital Imaginaries, where she works at the intersection of art, technology, and human connection. With a 360° view of international project development, she leads on proposal writing, coordination, and strategic planning across European networks — with a growing focus on Afro-European cultural exchange and collaboration.



During the "Méga Pic Nic", mums and women from the neighbourhood met to discuss the future of the garden © Hugo Bouguin



IMPERMANENCE

In this framework, impermanence was not treated as a limitation, but as a strategic and generative condition. The projects within this cluster embraced temporality as a way to experiment, adapt, and respond to shifting circumstances. Rather than aiming for permanence or stability, they developed approaches that were flexible, open-ended, and responsive to both environmental and social dynamics.

The impermanence of the spaces was maintained and activated through temporary and agile strategies. These included short-term installations, reversible interventions, and processes that could evolve over time without requiring fixed infrastructure.

Impermanence became a way to test ideas, engage communities, and explore ecological practices without imposing definitive or irreversible transformations. In this sense, it opened up a space for continuous learning, iteration, and reimagining of what urban environments can become.



Final touches on the GreenFeel structure © Ovidiu Miçsa

Timisoara

A PHYSICAL INTERVENTION THAT SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND SUSTAINS TOGETHERNESS OVER TIME, BEYOND URBAN CHANGE

GreenFeel is a temporary and adaptable space designed to celebrate and protect nature. The project exemplifies collaborative resource management and community engagement. With GreenFeel as its home, a flexible, nature-inspired structure took shape within the PLAI pilot to redefine public space, foster community, creativity, and connection. Designed with impermanence and adaptability in mind, the structure and program around it invited people to shape the space, bridging physical boundaries while inspiring civic engagement and lasting social impact.

The PLAI FD Pilot reimagines urban space as a catalyst for community engagement, creativity, and social connection. Starting

PLAI is a nonprofit cultural organisation based in Timișoara, Romania, dedicated to promoting intercultural dialogue and community engagement through the arts. It is best known for its annual world music and multicultural arts festival, held in the city's Botanical Garden, which brings together local and international artists in celebration of cultural diversity. Through its initiatives, PLAI has established itself as a significant contributor to Timișoara's broader cultural landscape.

plai.ro

from a physical site, we designed a circular, nature-inspired structure (built from reusable materials) that harmonized with its surroundings. The actions have embraced impermanence, allowing the space to evolve organically while encouraging individuals and communities to shape it according to their needs. Activities within the structure include workshops, gatherings, and events, fostering interaction, knowledge exchange, and collaboration. Beyond its immediate users, the project demonstrates a replicable approach to urban regeneration through simple, non-invasive interventions that promote civic responsibility and collective creativity. By blending environmental sensitivity with social design, the project creates a “people’s space” that transcends physical boundaries, inspires new initiatives, and cultivates a sense of ownership and belonging. Ultimately, it seeks to leave a lasting legacy in both the local community and the wider urban context.

STARTING POINT

The space is not defined by its physical boundaries but by the community that uses it. Starting from an existing physical space,





the guiding question was: how can it become a catalyst for the community, and

“The pavilion offers protection from rain and the blazing summer sun, while respecting the principle of minimal, reversible intervention. It's beautiful and useful!”

how can it facilitate the emergence of new initiatives and communities? The objective was to define a “people’s space,” shaped not only by architecture but also by social relationships. This process is directly influenced by the site, the natural setting, and both current and future users.

As a first step, it was necessary to identify a suitable context in which the initiative could take shape, based on essential criteria: the presence of a natural component, public accessibility of the space, and compliance with existing legal regulations. Once the general framework was established, the next step was selecting the optimal site.

APPROACH

GreenFeel, with its large area, diverse communities, and specific needs, presented a set of additional constraints that required us to develop appropriate responses.

KEY MOMENTS + DECISIONS

We interpreted the concept of *impermanence* through the way an object ages and gradually dissolves, through the complete reversibility of interventions, and through the way nature resumes its course after human action. In this way, the project's theme began to take shape in response to the needs identified at GreenFeel, following the rhythm of nature, exploring impermanence on multiple levels, and creating a space for people designed to inspire and foster connections within communities and beyond.

CHALLENGES

The first challenge was identifying the site, as several locations were considered suitable for regeneration through this project. This process proved difficult due to bureaucratic and administrative limitations related to access and intervention. Ultimately, the project was implemented at GreenFeel, a privately owned space that



also functions as a public one, being the only green area with the potential to serve as a neighborhood park in an urban context perceived as marginalized.

The second challenge was developing a solution that responded to all established principles and identified needs. With the support of our collaborators, we implemented a multifunctional structure that serves as a shelter and meeting point and, through its flexibility, facilitates various activities, workshops, and events. The structure was conceived as a fully reversible intervention, built from reusable materials and aesthetically integrated into the natural landscape, while respecting the site and its surroundings.

A qualitative impact that the project has had is the implementation of an urban regeneration approach based on simple, non-invasive interventions using reusable materials. At a broader, city-wide scale, this method can bring people closer to public space through an object that encourages civic engagement, responsibility, and, ultimately, community initiative.

QUALITATIVE
IMPACT

Read the article
"Small Scale–Big Impact:
Temporary Small-Scale
Architecture as a Catalyst
for Community-Driven
Development of Green
Urban Spaces" [here](#).

From an architectural perspective, the project represents an example of good practice and was published by architect Diana Giurea in connection with this initiative.

“The structure is a real support for us. It provides shelter from the rain and protects us from the sun, and at the same time it has become the central meeting point—a place for stories and shared activities—for the Greenfeel community of bee lovers.”

INSIGHTS

Some processes need to be allowed to develop organically. We learned this by observing that people need time to discover a space on their own, and the desire to use it must come from within the community. Although we attempted to program and attract multiple activities within the structure, its novelty and peripheral location made activation more difficult. This was further

Garden of Impermanence



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intensified by limited accessibility: cycling depends on favorable weather, public transport runs infrequently, and does not reach the site directly, making users reliant on cars. Once existing communities began using the space actively, people gradually became familiar with it and started to engage with it more frequently.

CLUSTER IMPERMANENCE

The approach to the concept of impermanence was explored through multiple directions, all sharing time as a common element. The initial proposal aimed to create a structure capable of supporting both a physical space and a space dedicated to people — a place for gathering, ideas, and collective creativity. This intention was interpreted through flexibility: the way each individual or community can shape the space according to their own needs, a process requiring a high degree of openness and adaptability.

On the other hand, time defines impermanence, whether through the existence of an object that transforms, ages, and gradually dissolves in a fixed location, or through the limited duration of



its presence in a context, while retaining the ability to be moved and reinterpreted in other places.

In designing the structure, all these aspects were taken into account — formal,

“FDC has given the opportunity to explore, learn, follow through and measure the impact of a collaboration that means a lot to us - PLAI and Greenfeel - which is a strong exercise of independent stewardship of local initiatives that solve community needs. This type of collaboration, beyond the principles and values that inspired the FD Pavilion, are a strong testament of communities that can empower each other and together shape things for the better.”

structural, and functional — integrated within the context through a non-invasive intervention throughout the implementation process, as well as aesthetically harmonized with the surroundings. The result is a circular, nature-inspired structure, fully reversible and made from reusable materials, which has allowed nature, after nearly two years, to reassert its presence both around and within the space, influencing the way the environment has developed in relation to the structure.

We do not know if the structure will still be standing in 10 years; this largely depends on the extent to which the community takes responsibility for its maintenance. However, even if it no longer exists, the project has set a precedent for how we intervene in a natural environment, and its absence could inspire the emergence of new, even more valuable initiatives for the site.

Through this project, we aimed to provide an example of best practice and to encourage others to do the same, from the process of identifying needs, to how these needs coalesced into a structure, and to the way people define a space through its use.



Andreea Iager Tako is passionate about connecting people, ideas, and projects to create models that drive impactful change in communities. She co-founded Central Cultural PLAI, AMBASADA, FABER and ONE.shirt, a slow fashion social enterprise addressing textile pollution and promoting social inclusion. During the pandemic, she focused on creating sustainable solutions that combined environmental awareness with community impact. A member of Trans Europe Halles since 2017 and an Executive Committee Board member since 2021, Andreea continues to champion innovative, creative, and community-driven projects across Europe.

ΠΑΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΠΑΚΤΗΡΙΩΝ
SOFI PLEX
Η ΕΔΡΗ ΤΑΝΝΗΣ Κ. ΣΙΑ ΟΕ

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Athens

BUILDING SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR CREATIVES IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD UNDER TRANSFORMATION

PLEX is BIOS' boldest experiment yet, located in Kerameikos: a neighbourhood of thresholds, where ancient burial grounds meet potters' quarters, and today abandoned neoclassical houses coexist with migrant families, short-term rentals, and artists transforming vacant spaces. Within Future DiverCities, we're operating PLEX PILOT as a living laboratory testing what culture-led urban futures can mean when grounded in local realities.

The project unfolds across two neighbouring buildings on Kerameikou Street: Kerameikou 28, a historic weaving factory complex becoming our main cultural centre for exhibitions, performances, and community gatherings; and Kerameikou 30, the adjacent hotel building becoming Kerameikos Hotel,

BIOS is a think tank, a production team, and a dynamic creative community. Through community engagement, we have advocated for social inclusion, diversity, and gender equity. BIOS has established strong and long-lasting partnerships and collaborations with both local and European organizations, has advocated for policy change within the creative sectors, as well as created networks enhancing the creative, economic and social impact of creative hubs.

The main goal is to make art accessible to everyone, spark genuine interest and offer compelling hands-on educational and research programs - always within the arts and culture context.

bios.gr

providing social housing and artists' residencies.

Together, these spaces form a cultural and social infrastructure we've designed to support artistic experimentation, community engagement, and inclusive urban regeneration, while anchoring artists in the neighbourhood and creating economic activity without displacing local life.

STARTING POINT

PLEX PILOT was launched to respond to a contradiction at the heart of today's Athens: the city's cultural vibrancy is internationally recognised, yet conditions for artists are precarious and unsupported. Athens feels like it is at a critical point. Housing prices have risen over 50 percent in recent years, and nearly 80 percent of renters are considered overburdened. Artists, who have long sought out neighbourhoods like Kerameikos for affordability and community, now face displacement.

Kerameikos illustrates this contradiction drastically. A neighbourhood of thresholds, historically rich with ancient burial grounds, potters' quarters, and industrial heritage, it is today a patchwork of abandoned

neoclassical houses, migrant families squeezed into small apartments, short-term rentals pushing residents out, and artists transforming vacant spaces. We aimed to intervene before this cycle repeats: by building support structures that allow creators and local inhabitants to shape change, rather than being used as temporary aesthetic “upgrade” for gentrification. This requires data, listening, community trust, and a space where dialogue can happen.

“Sharing ideas and vital information has helped us navigate the challenges of working as artists in Athens.”

PLEX is positioned as a cultural and social infrastructure combining multiple elements. The project draws on years of our research: the CreatorsClass survey with over 300 artists, mapping of abandoned buildings, interviews with residents, and participatory workshops. Our vision is to create a support

APPROACH



PLEX courtyard during a community gathering © Bjorn Ricketts

structure anchored in two neighbouring buildings on Kerameikou Street.

Kerameikou 28 will become our main cultural centre for exhibitions, performances, workshops, and community gatherings. Kerameikou 30, the adjacent hotel building, will become Kerameikos Hotel: a social housing and artists' residency unit, providing affordable living for creators while rooting them in neighbourhood life. Together with an open-air designers' market and community gardens, these form a superstructure that anchors artists in the area, creates space for residents, and generates cultural and economic activity without displacing local life. PLEX Open Pilot 1 marked the public's first chance to step into this vision.

A crucial decision was to define PLEX not as a fixed renovation or permanent institution, but as a living prototype that could be activated immediately. On Friday, 26 September, the doors were opened to PLEX Open Pilot 1, the first in a series of events shaping PLEX's identity. This approach serves as a meeting point, testing

KEY
MOMENTS +
DECISIONS

ground, and public signal that another model of urban transformation is possible, allowing us to respond to Kerameikos' volatility without waiting for ideal conditions. A second key moment for us was the start of our research process on the working and living conditions of creators, which included mapping and survey data collection. This shifted our pilot from visibility-driven programming to structural groundwork, creating a solid base for future support systems and dialogue with the city. A third defining moment was when we started realising that people were returning to the building, and that slowly, a community was forming again.

CHALLENGES

The project operates in a neighbourhood with high sensitivity: rapid investment pressure, visible social inequality, and competing narratives of what the area should and could become.

One challenge for sure was operating as a cultural actor without becoming a tool of gentrification ourselves. Our solution was to ground our work in research and coalition-



Conversation among architecture students and DECA Architecture during PLEX Pilot 1 © Luca Marie Tüshaus



Symposium during PLEX Pilot 1 © Luca Marie Tüshaus

building rather than only visibility and events.

Another challenge was the structural lack of support frameworks for artists in Athens: limited public funding, unstable housing, expensive rents, and fragmented ecosystems. We tried to respond by positioning PLEX as a site for building support mechanisms, not merely showcasing culture.

A third challenge was building community trust: Before we purchased the building, a local artist collective had been squatting the space and perceived the transition as displacement. This created initial resistance and mistrust. We responded through continuous dialogue, transparent communication, and by creating participatory formats that invite local voices into shaping the project's direction.

“The failures of urban renewal reflect a failure... to realize that people, not structures, really determine a city's success.”

Lastly, gathering data required care and caution; our survey and mapping had to be framed respectfully, so creators felt their realities were being meaningfully recognised and we weren't acting with only our own agenda.

QUALITATIVE IMPACT

PLEX has contributed to shifting how cultural regeneration can be imagined in Athens: not as cosmetic upgrading, but as a slow infrastructure of care, knowledge, and participation. Our research work, mapping and survey design has created a basis for wider advocacy around artists' needs and for future conversations with institutions, funders, and potentially municipal actors. Qualitatively, PLEX is contributing to strengthening cultural visibility for Kerameikos. By positioning creators as residents of the city rather than temporary "coolness providers," we challenge simplistic creative-city stories.

PLEX also helps connect local and international creative communities in Athens, supporting cultural bridge-building without erasing local specificity. As a pilot

site, it functions as a demonstration: a visible experiment of what it looks like when a cultural organisation actively supports artists' working conditions and neighbourhood relationships at the same time. The wider impact lies in this new strategy as a template, one that can influence policy discussion and future cultural governance.

In the coming decade, we hope that PLEX will be recognized as a moment of change where artist support structures are not an issue of urban planning, but rather a critical element of urbanization in Athens. This vision reflects our desire that the legacy of PLEX is not merely one success of a single venue, but a model that demonstrates how culture-based regeneration, through protecting creators, expanding housing and workspace options, and providing resilience in communities, is possible without displacing residents from their homes and communities.

One central insight is that regeneration cannot be built on visibility alone; it needs support structures and dedication. Athens

INSIGHTS



Community Yoga @ Bjorn Ricketts

has enormous creative energy, but without affordable housing, stable workspaces, and supportive ecosystems, that energy becomes extractable and fragile.

A second insight is that “impermanence” is not just a spatial condition, it shapes social life. Temporary urban conditions intensify precariousness, but they also allow experimentation. We’ve learned that agile cultural infrastructures can create continuity through recurring practices: mapping, community presence, open events, and coalition-building.

Finally, the neighbourhood itself teaches us that urban futures must be negotiated with those already living there.

We address impermanence not as a temporary inconvenience to overcome, but as a condition to work with which might even be worth protecting. Kerameikos’ volatility creates instability for those who live and work in the area, especially artists who often rely on temporary spaces and low-cost rents. Our starting point was to acknowledge that the neighbourhood is continuously changing, and that any cultural

CLUSTER
IMPERMANENCE

intervention must be able to adapt without becoming a vehicle for displacement.

We approached PLEX PILOT as an agile infrastructure or platform rather than a fixed institution. A space that can shift between functions: Community gathering point, creative workspace, and cultural venue.

“Artists within a city form a community, not a transitional group used to achieve gentrification.”

This flexibility enabled immediate activation through events and encounters, while leaving the long-term identity of the site open, co-shaped through use. In parallel, our mapping and survey-based research was a first step to understand creators’ living and working conditions in Athens, filling a major data gap and reframing creator precarity as an urban policy issue. By working with temporary programming, flexible partnerships, and evolving spatial practices, we strengthen impermanence as an asset: it allows experimentation without



premature closure, makes space for unexpected collaborations, and helps build resilience through continuous adaptation.

Our pilot reveals that the most important form of permanence may be a social one, namely through sustained relationships between creators and communities.

LOOKING AHEAD 10 YEARS

Through PLEX, we hope to create a future where artists are recognized not only as “temporary catalysts” for gentrification but as fulltime residents of their communities who will help to build a stronger social connection, greater education, and a stronger sense of identity and civic engagement within their neighbourhoods.

Finally, we would like to see the research and mapping that began with the pilot project evolve into an ongoing observatory of the conditions of creators in Athens and produce data that can support municipal accountability and advocate for improvements in the conditions of creators.

We would also like to be a source of inspiration to other cultural organizations in

Europe by showing how temporary use of buildings and spaces can provide opportunities for creative, sustainable, and resilient urban regeneration.



Vassilis Charalampidis is the founder and artistic director of BIOS, a cultural organisation in Athens focused on urban culture, the arts, and the creative industries. Beyond its flagship venue on Peiraios Street, BIOS initiatives include Romantso, the first support structure for cultural and creative enterprises in Greece, and PLEX, a multipurpose cultural centre in Kerameikos. He is also founding member and president of the European Creative Hubs Network, uniting over 400 members across 36 countries to strengthen the creative economy and shape relevant policy at a European level.

PROSPAGANDA DEL PARTITO
CUI VU' PORTATE
E DEL PRIMO VOTORE

2



Florence

A DIMORA: CONTEMPORARY ART RESIDENCIES REGENERATING RURAL LONDA

In a village near Florence, Italy, artists arrive not as visitors but as temporary citizens. Through performances, encounters, and site-specific works, A dimora reawakens forgotten sites and turns rural life into a stage for contemporary imagination and communal action.

Spanning from 2023 to 2025, A dimora was a residency pilot in Londa, Tuscany, designed to foster culture-led regeneration in a rural context. Over three summer cycles, the project hosted 12 artists who immersed themselves in the territory, treating the town and its surrounding nature as an active, "indefinite space" for research.

The primary objective was to bridge the gap between contemporary artistic languages

LAMA is a Florence-based social enterprise working at the intersection of culture, urban regeneration, and social impact. Through projects spanning cultural programming, participatory research, and artist residencies, the organisation develops strategies aimed at strengthening the social and creative fabric of cities and communities.

agenzia.lama.eu
adimora.xyz

and the local community, transforming a perceived marginal area into a vibrant site of creative production. Through a blend of ephemeral performances, public programs, and the creation of nine permanent artworks, *A dimora* reactivated underutilized spaces—from ancient quarries to vacant shops. The initiative aimed to build a dynamic, living heritage, proving that rural areas can possess the same cultural dignity as urban centers while leaving a lasting legacy of trust, new narratives, and shared imagination.

STARTING POINT

The core challenge *A dimora* aimed to address was bringing contemporary art to Londa, a live place and not a detached space. The goal was to foster slow, culture-led regeneration in a rural town unaccustomed to such interventions. We sought to do this not just by producing art, but by inviting non-local artists to reinterpret the community's needs and desires. LAMA acted as a mediator and co-designer, facilitating processes where diverse local instances could be represented. The challenge lay in grounding abstract



contemporary practices—both permanent and ephemeral—within a specific community context to create outcomes that were truly engaging and representative of the territory.

APPROACH

We developed a flexible residency program spanning the summer months, inviting artists to live and work in Londa for extended periods. This format evolved annually to better align the needs of the artists with those of the local community. To address the complexity of the context, LAMA deployed a multidisciplinary team to support the artists' research and production while simultaneously managing stakeholder relationships.

A crucial part of our approach was keeping the Public Administration at the center of the conversation and ensuring constant, transparent communication with the citizenry to foster a sense of shared ownership over the cultural process.

“Can we make a map to help people explore all of our artworks in the town?”



KEY MOMENTS + DECISIONS

Three pivotal moments defined our trajectory. First, in 2024, we relocated the artists' accommodation from a further hamlet to the town center, significantly boosting their autonomy and natural integration into daily community life. Second, we expanded the public program with studio visits and talks, opening the project to external cultural professionals while deepening local engagement. Third, we facilitated the Municipality's acquisition of Agnese Banti's 2023 sound installation, "Fior di Mezzogiorno...". This decision, driven by popular demand, marked a strategic shift from temporary experimentation to building a permanent public art collection, solidifying the community's desire for lasting cultural assets.

CHALLENGES

We faced initial skepticism regarding contemporary art and the perceived transience of artists. We addressed this by prioritizing slow integration, facilitating both official and spontaneous encounters. In the third edition, we converted a main square shop into a visible studio, demonstrating that value lies in the creative process, not

just the object. Another challenge was operating without a pre-existing cultural infrastructure.

“This place is full of [the] imaginary, we need to work on imagining”

Through mapping and community dialogue, we identified underused spaces like an old quarry and a former green area along the lake. We balanced this by organically transitioning from ephemeral performances to site-specific, permanent interventions, ensuring that the works were coherent with the territory rather than forced upon it.

The pilot successfully introduced contemporary cultural languages to a rural area typically excluded from such circuits, demonstrating how art can drive regeneration by acting on collective imagination and desire. Londa has been enriched with a collection of contemporary artworks, increasing its appeal to both general visitors and the specialized art public. On a policy level, *A dimora* shifted

IMPACT

the local discourse on heritage, moving beyond a static view of conservation to embrace heritage as dynamic and living, encompassing both material works and intangible processes. This impact is evidenced by the Municipality's explicit request to continue collaborating on future editions.

INSIGHTS

1. Make sure that the community knows “What’s going on?”: Keeping citizens informed and involved is vital because people make the place.
2. Long-term builds a stronger trust: Long-term residencies prevent artists from being perceived as "aliens" or "conquerors." Meaningful, extended stays foster genuine relationships.
3. Art can make a place better: Art can improve a place, but the outcome must be mediated. Discussing the final results ensures artworks feel integrated rather than imposed.
4. Participatory practices help the engagement: Whether led by artists or the





organization, participatory practices engage the community's heart and body, creating a deeper emotional connection to the project.

The Florence pilot, titled *A dimora* (2023-2025), unfolded in the municipality of Londa within the Valdisieve area. From the outset, the project understood impermanence as a defining condition rather than a constraint, working within an "indefinite space" that encompassed not just the town, but its ever-transitioning natural surroundings of forests, streams, and plateaus. Designed by LAMA as a culture-led regeneration initiative, the project invited 12 artists (Agnese Banti, Iacopo Seri, Luca Boffi (Alberonero), Simone Carraro, Arianna Pace, Ornella Cardillo, Tommaso Mannucci (Monograff), Andrea Grasselli, Chiara Gambirasio, Gaia Coals, Martina Cioffi, and Samuel Rosi (Muz)) over three summer cycles to live, research, and create within this rural context.

Navigating this environment presented distinct challenges, particularly regarding the community. Building trust and demonstrating the intrinsic value of the

project required an adaptive, site-specific approach. Consequently, dissemination and communication were adapted to the rural context, implementing the standard promotion to ensure the local population played a central role in *A dimora*'s narrative.

To work productively with *impermanence*, LAMA relied on informal exchanges, word-of-mouth, and integration with the local *Montagna Fiorentina* festival, allowing the project to remain responsive rather than fixed. This adaptive methodology turned impermanence into an asset, allowing the project to evolve alongside the seasons. The pilot's legacy comprises nine permanent and three impermanent artworks now owned by the Municipality, which has assumed responsibility for their maintenance. These works serve to solidify the relationship between the urban environment, nature, and inhabitants.

“<<Mettere a dimora>>
means placing a plant in the
ground permanently.”

Crucially, very little was physically "built" from scratch. The artistic output prioritized performances involving sound and light, or site-specific interventions on existing elements—such as the quarry, portico, and fountain—rather than heavy construction. Beyond the physical art, *A dimora* addressed pragmatic issues by reactivating underutilized assets, such as renting vacant apartments and converting a former shop into a studio. By grounding the project in the reality of the landscape, *A dimora* fostered a new sense of imagination and possibility. Ultimately, it transferred agency to the citizens and institutions, ensuring that while the residencies were temporary, the cultural revitalization and the value placed on these lived spaces remain enduring.

We envision a twofold legacy. First, we hope to cement the recognition of "rural areas" not as marginal spaces, but as vibrant centers of creation and change, possessing equal cultural dignity to major urban hubs. Second, we aim to demonstrate that culture-led regeneration—even through ephemeral forms like performance—can have a profound impact

LOOKING AHEAD
10 YEARS

within a territory. By weaving contemporary practices into the social fabric, we aim to demonstrate that sustainable, lasting value is generated not only by physical structures but also by profound, intangible relationships ignited by cultural practices.



Martina Aiazzi Mancini is a Florence-based cultural mediator and curator who trained in photography and psychology before specialising in art education and cultural mediation. At LAMA, she serves as coordinator of cultural activities, working across social innovation and culture-based regeneration. She is also the founder of *duepunti*, a curatorial collective supporting emerging artists.



Public Program Talk 'Art outside big centers', A dimora 2025 © Eleonora Saviozzi

GLOSSARY

Collaborative process - working in a thematic group (clusters) the partners exchanged, supported each other, and developed collaborations.

Cross-sectoral collaborations - the key to the enabling project is the establishment of a collective of citizens (Local Coalitions) in all pilot cities constituted by different kinds of stakeholders and the collaboration between diverse European partners.

Do It Together (DIT) culture - everyone has a say and we all learn from each other.

Multidisciplinary - the project's design involves multidisciplinary skills and experience.

Local Coalitions - they are a collective of citizens who have the willingness to gain ecological knowledge when engaging with development projects in their cities and neighborhoods. They want to contribute to

making their neighborhoods and their cities a greener and better place.

Ecological awareness - at the end of the project, the ecology should be at the centre of the organisational development and ethos of the partners.

Cultural urban regeneration - the project will create its own new ecological assessment tools to better quantify and quality the ecological impact with a framework adapted to a variety of cultural interventions.

Urban ecology - the term "urban ecology" has been used variously to describe the study of humans in cities, of nature in cities, and of the coupled relationships between humans and nature. "Urban ecology" is the name of one of our training programme about changing perspectives and understanding the conditions of neglect, viewing the empty spaces both as ecological spots but also as political spots, and building the capacity to create better governance to transform the spaces positively and create the conditions for sustained care.

Changemaking - is a training proposed at city level about becoming city changemakers. Changemaking is an effective organizational or societal change. (sources: Ashoka)

Sensitive mapping - sensitive mapping is a new form of participatory mapping that consists of translating an individual or collective spatial representation into a material output according to a subjective, affective, imaginary, and/or creative reading of a space.





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