

Landscape Architecture and the Green Deal Dare

Subjects: Architecture And Design

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Landscape architecture can be defined as the art of composing landform, water and plants with buildings and pavements to make good places. Natural elements, such air, wind, vegetation, soil and sun, are what landscape architecture is made of, and their thaumaturgical power can be revealed in the open spaces of cities. The Green Deal can be an opportunity to overturn the traditional building-centric view of the city in favor of a new interpretation of it through work on open spaces.

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1. Climate Change and the Green Deal Dare

The world we live in today is undergoing a general and rapid climate change. Everywhere on our planet there are windstorms, torrential rains and freezing or very hot air, which take places and people by surprise and sometimes in a violent manner.

Europe is not exempt from these sudden manifestations of nature; for example, the summer of 2021 was the hottest in thirty years according to Copernicus, the European Union's Earth observation program. Moreover, in October 2018, the Vaia storm affected the north of Italy, parts of Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia, destroying thousands of hectares of alpine coniferous forests in the process forming a natural disaster. These powerful and repeated manifestations of nature, caused by man's mismanagement of resources over the last fifty years, occur in both natural and urban contexts. In cities, the quality of everyday life is conditioned, often negatively, by its unfolding over time. The way we manage changes in our daily lives, the way we work and the way we tend to urban spaces are all causes of climate change events. All of our actions, if not carried out responsibly, risk increasing air pollution and heat islands. Cities are already densely built up with a large part of the land covered by asphalt; they suffer and appear to be fragile and defenseless organisms. The Climate Change 2022 Report from IPCC pays special attention to the relationship between climate change and cities, and it "has a strong focus on the interactions among the coupled systems' climate, ecosystems (including their biodiversity) and human society. These interactions are the basis of emerging risks from climate change, ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, and, at the same time, offer opportunities for the future" ^[1] (p. 6).

In order to preserve our lands and lives during these transformations, in December 2019, the European Commission signed the Green Deal as a way to "protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital, and protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts" ^[2] (p. 2). The Green Deal proposes action in different but closely related areas (society, the economy and the climate), with the aim of achieving a significant shift towards a more ecological and inclusive Europe in 2030 and also in 2050. A lot of money has been allocated for the Deal, and this gives us the measure of the political relevance that environmental action currently has in the EU states. The financial program in the document, published on the European Commission website, tells us of "at least EUR 1 trillion of sustainable investments over the next decade. A greater share of spending on climate and environmental action from the EU budget than ever before will crowd in private funding, with a key role to be played by the European Investment Bank" ^[3].

2. The Role of Landscape Architecture

An important way to ameliorate the environment of the cities in a structural way (enacting policies that use a part of this huge amount of money), could be played by landscape architecture. According to Tom Turner, the definition of landscape architecture "is the art of composing landform, water and plants with buildings and pavements to make good places" ^[4]. Natural elements, such air, wind, vegetation, soil and sun, are what landscape architecture is made of, and their thaumaturgical power can be revealed in the open spaces of cities. The Green Deal can be an opportunity to overturn the traditional building-centric view of the city in favor of a new interpretation of it through work on open spaces. A part of the responsibility for affirming and following up on the idea should lie in the design of it.

The cities' renovation process, according to the Deal, aims for ecological sustainability and social justice, and is strictly related with the ability of landscape architects to conceive of new forms of managing and caring for the urban environment.

Many important contemporary authors, such as Gilles Clément, Michel Desvigne and Peter Latz, have already implemented, in the past twenty years, projects involving urban parks, public squares, streets and infrastructures, in which large parts of cities have been rescued from their state of neglect and pollution. Henri Matisse Park in Lille (Clément), Dora Park in Turin (Latz) and *Île Seguin* in Paris (Desvigne) are just a few examples of successful transformations which have been able to reveal the environmental, expressive and ethical power that the action on the landscape is able to evoke and shows how successful this can be in densely built places.

Leaving no one behind in the transition is the other main goal of the Deal, together with the environmental one. In 1950, Garret Eckbo, a master of the discipline, wrote: "Our work is done for people, to provide settings and surroundings for their life and activities. Therefore all its forms must relate definitely to the forms of people: to their size, their shape, the way in which they move about and relax, their requirements as to air, sun, shade, the way in which they perceive their surroundings and so on. This observation may seem simple and elementary to the point of naïveté, until one looks about with open eyes and sees how seldom our environment is really formed to fit the simple and fundamental needs of the people who must live in" ^[5] (p. 73). The works which we might call 'social landscape' are carried on by a number of authors (such as the collective *Bruit du Frigo* based in Bordeaux, Gravalos—Di Monte in Saragoza and also through urban politics as in Berlin for the *Tempelhofer feld*), and these match the need for organization, legitimacy and clarity in today's new urban social geographies so as not to leave anyone behind. "Cultural evolution requires a new organization of cities and territory, and this, in turn, determines new cultural evolutions" ^[6] (p. 54).

3. The Necessity to Restore 'Landscape' in the Deal and to Improve it through Political Choices

The dialectical synthesis between the natural and anthropic elements that the city is made of, could, through design and suitable political choices ^[7], respond to the need for the evolutionary transformation that the Deal aims for. Diana Balmori, in her manifesto, states that "landscape renders the city as constantly evolving in response to climate, geography, and history and it is becoming the main actor of the urban stage, not just a destination" ^[8] (p. 225). We, as citizens, are an active part of this process of generating new aesthetics, new ethics and new ecologies that aim to raise cities above congestion and degradation.

Furthermore, according to Balmori, landscape can be like poetry: highly suggestible and open to multiple interpretations. However, this word, 'landscape', is never mentioned in the Green Deal text. The absence of this term in the text manifests a cultural and political problem. According to the European Landscape Convention, "landscape is part of the land, as perceived by local people, or visitors, which evolves through time as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings. "Landscape policy" reflects the public authorities' awareness of the need to frame and implement a policy landscape. The public is encouraged to take an active part in its protection, conserving and maintaining the heritage value of a particular landscape, in its management, helping to steer changes brought about by economic, social or environmental necessity, and in its planning" ^[9] (p. 2). The fact that the landscape is never mentioned in key documents for managing climate change is a symptom of an important political and cultural problem. What is not recognized is not the environment (which is often present in its physical dimension as a whole of natural systems) but the cultural dimension and synthesis between the different ecological and social elements. The term landscape doesn't appear even in the *New EU forest strategy for 2030* published in July 2021, as one of the flagship initiatives of the document. We can observe how the urban environment is considered as a possible and even privileged place for the strengthening of the presence of trees. This is one of the key points of the plan. The text states: "there is potential for extending forest and tree coverage in the EU through active and sustainable re- and afforestation and tree planting. This concerns mainly urban and peri-urban areas (including e.g., urban parks, trees on public and private property, greening buildings and infrastructure, and urban gardens) and agricultural area" ^[10] (p. 15).

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