

**Desire site experience and  
future plans**

Deliverable 3.2  
31.08.2024



**COVER PAGE**

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**Desire site experience and future plans – DELIVERABLE 3.2**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

NEB	New European Bauhaus
WP	Work package
ODG	Design & Do groups

## KEYWORDS

- Site experiences
- Experimentation
- Urban transformation
- Democratic engagement
- Civic participation
- Principles
- Co-creation

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Table 1. Overview of the sites



## D3.2: Desire site experiences and future plans

### 1 Introduction

This report is Deliverable 3.2 of Desire – Designing the Irresistible Circular Society, one of six New European Bauhaus (NEB) Lighthouse Demonstrator projects funded by the Horizon Europe program. Desire is a two-year project exploring what makes an irresistible circular society across Europe. It addresses three themes: social and inclusive housing, reconciling cities with nature, and transforming through symbiotic relationships. The project spans eight sites in European cities undergoing redevelopment and regeneration and strives to unfold a participatory process of discovery and learning to add quality and shared value to broader and long-term urban transformations. Within WP2 Co-design principles and tools five principles, (*circularity, belonging, movement, biodiversity, and aesthetics*) have been developed - the principles serve as foundational guidelines and adaptable entities to facilitate systemic change within the respective local contexts (please refer to D2.2 Set of principles and transformation questions for more information). The focus of the demonstration activities is to experiment, test, and learn which tools and approaches are useful and create value and impact when applying the principles. The overall aim is to accurately curate a selection of tools and approaches for replication and scaling, identifying actions that support the implementation of the principles in other contexts and sites outside the Desire consortium.

Following this first introductory chapter (Chapter 1), chapter 2 of this deliverable outlines the experience aggregation, evaluation, and revision of various activities conducted in the eight territorial sites involved in Desire: the Asphalt factory, Herlev (Denmark); Gadehavegaard, Høje-Taastrup (Denmark); Circular Campus, Kalundborg (Denmark); Wildemanbuurt, Amsterdam (The Netherlands); BTC City, Ljubljana (Slovenia); MIND, Milano (Italy); Ziepju, Riga (Latvia); and Cascina Falchera, Turin (Italy). Chapter 3 synthesises the lessons learned from across the sites' experiences and recommendations for future governance. Chapter 4 highlights implications for the Desire principles, and chapter 5 outlines reflections and takeaways from the expert organisations involved in the project. Chapter 6 presents the limitations and conclusions.

WP3 *On-site demonstration* played a key role in the activities conducted at each site, providing support through a combination of online and in-person workshops, as well as individual meetings, to ensure the development of eight feasible place-based activity plans within the project's timeframe. By engaging site representatives and expert organisations, WP3 facilitated co-creation formats and workshops, enabling the sites to plan and conduct local workshops for both expert and citizen groups. The place-based practices and experiences we report on in this deliverable 3.2 concerns the DO-level of Desire's Monitoring Assessment and Learning framework structure (see Figure 1). The DO-level describes actions carried out by the demonstration sites in the eight different contexts. This deliverable builds on the monitoring of the two year process (see *D3.1 Customization of the Desire principles and transformation plans*) and from the peer-to-peer (P2P) learning exchange program (Task 4.3), contributing to describing the process and methods that the 8 demonstration sites have undergone, as well as to the evaluation and development of the Desire principles (WP2).



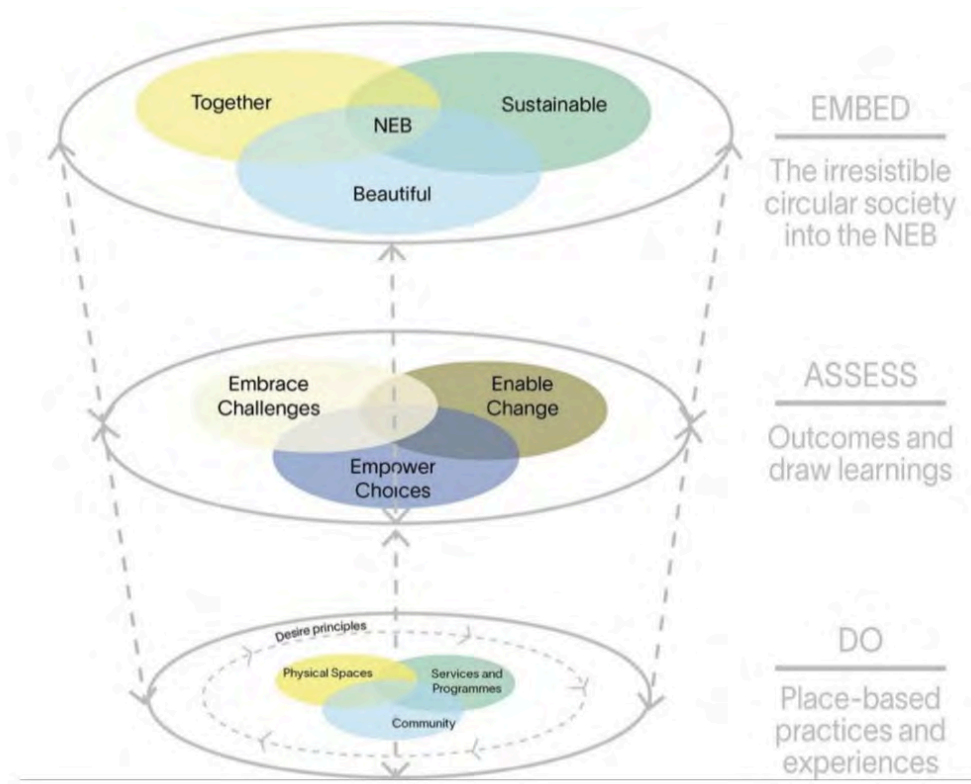


Figure 1 - Desire Monitoring, Assessment & Learning Framework, extracted from D4.1 Learning and Evaluation Framework

## 2 Site experiences

This chapter will provide an overview of the eight demonstration sites, delving into each site’s unique process, the specific tools they employed, the learnings and reflections gained from their experiences, and their future plans.

### Overview of the sites

Site	Principles	Partners	Experts	Theme	Territory	Ground
Asfalt Fabrikken, Herlev, Denmark	Biodiversity, Belonging, Aesthetic, Movement	NXT	Danske Ark, Gehl  Really Regenerative Center (RRC)	City nature	Urban	Ground
Cascina Falchera, Turin, Italy	Biodiversity, Belonging, Aesthetic	Municipality of Turin, Kairos	AGORA (subcontractor)  POLIMI	City nature	Suburban	Area
BTC City, Ljubljana,	Belonging, Movement,	BTC City	GXN	City nature	Urban	Street/area

Slovenia	Biodiversity					
Gadehavegaard, Høje-Taastrup, Denmark	Circularity, Biodiversity	Domea	GXN Danske Ark, SLA AGORA (subcontractor)	Social/inclusive housing	Suburban	Neighbourhood
Ziepju, Riga, Latvia	Aesthetics, Biodiversity, Belonging	Riga City Council	–	Social/inclusive housing	Suburban	Street/block
Wildemanbuurt, Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Belonging & Movement	The Beach, Stichting Samen Wonen Samen Leven (SW-SL)	–	Social/inclusive housing	Suburban	Neighbourhood
Circular Campus, Kalundborg, Denmark	Aesthetics, Movement, Belonging, Circularity	KHZ, Royal Danish Academy	Really Regenerative Center (RRC) Danske Ark, Tredje Nature	Symbiotic relationships	Provincial	District
MIND, Milan, Italy	Belonging, Aesthetics, Movement	PlusValue	POLIMI	Symbiotic relationships	Suburban	District

*Table 1 Overview of the sites*

## 2.1 Asfalt Fabrikken, Herlev, Denmark

### Context

Situated on the outskirts of Copenhagen in Herlev, Denmark, lies the former Asfalt Fabrik. Once an industrial site, demolished to make way for urban development, it is now undergoing rapid transformation into a residential area. Amidst this transition, and as part of the Desire project, the concept of the ‘Garden Caretaker’ is introduced on the construction grounds. The Garden Caretaker is a design proposal rooted in a regenerative approach to city planning and explores the integration of artistic methods in the early stages of urban development. This proposal emerged from the interdisciplinary 'Being of Place' methodology, which focuses on recording and mapping the unique characteristics of the site prior to its development. The term Garden Caretaker describes an individual who, within this project, temporarily inhabits a specific location within the city. Using various artistic practices such as fictional writing,



sculpting, landscape walks, performance, and music, they orchestrate, curate, and design a range of activities tailored to the site. These artistic activities are designed to foster a deeper connection between stakeholders and the natural environment, emphasizing the site-specific qualities and the symbiotic relationship between humans, flora, fauna, and the surrounding ecosystem. Stakeholders include residents and workers of Herlev, educational institutions and daycare centres in the area, builders working on the site, the artistic community, the local multispecies ecosystem, and the Desire partners. Involving these multiple partners and stakeholders, the primary objective is to engage citizens and foster a multispecies community with a strong emphasis on biodiversity and relational aesthetics.

## Process

The primary methodology is based on inviting artists to interact with the site, both with human and non-human inhabitants. Following an open call, the site has seen five different artists that took part in a residency program embodying the role of the garden caretakers. These garden caretakers brought their unique artistic practice and interpretation of the role to the place in Herlev, each emphasising participation, citizen involvement, and multispecies interactions. Their artistic activities served as a tool for sensing and exploring the site, rather than merely creating art objects. The artists worked from the temporary construction of a ‘droplet’, a greenhouse, that had been built next to the former asphalt factory, anchoring the activities to a specific place and time while also being a learning space where participants encountered the artistic processes (Figure 2).



*Figure 2 The droplet, designed by architect Kristoffer Tejlgaard, with its unusual shape and choice of materials – round, small, and see-through – hosted the artists and participants and sparked curiosity of passers-by.*

The site has chosen the principles of *aesthetics*, *biodiversity*, *belonging*, and *movement*. Collaborating with artists is in line with the principle of *aesthetics*. The artists were chosen

for their interest in working with natural ecosystems, multispecies communities, the sensing of place, relational aesthetics, participatory practices, and site-specific approaches, which are integral to the site's vision. However, the end goal of these artistic works was not aesthetic in the sense of an artwork found in a museum. Instead, the aesthetics lie embedded in the process itself – the exploration and transformation they initiate within the site and among the people participating in the artistic process.

Aligned with the second principle of *biodiversity*, the site adopted a multi-species perspective in its approach. The artists they engage predominantly work with natural and found materials, prioritising minimal environmental impact and striving for a harmonious relationship with their surroundings. Their methodologies are particularly centred on fostering deeper attentiveness and awareness of the place among stakeholders. This involved encouraging participants to spend time outdoors, cultivating attentiveness to the local multispecies ecosystem, and facilitating sensory experiences that immerse individuals in the natural environment.

Aligned with the third principle of *belonging*, the artists foster a strong sense of connection and belonging between participants and the site. This initiative extends to engaging local institutions to further solidify community ties. The practices employed are inherently site-specific, involving hands-on interactions with natural materials, local species, and the stories of the site. Moreover, they are designed to be inclusive and participatory, encouraging active engagement from all participants to cultivate a sense of awareness and belonging. What is particularly intriguing is the artists' interaction with local stakeholders, notably the children from the nearby kindergarten, who started to warmly greet and wave at the artists as they passed by. Being physically present at the site was a precondition for this and was considered really important.

Finally, the site embraces the principle of *movement*. On the one hand, the principle of *movement* informs the artistic approaches employed, which are designed to move participants' attention and awareness to seldom-explored realms, encouraging them to notice often-overlooked beings, move at a slower pace, gaze upward, gaze downwards, and pay attention to details. These practices aimed to ignite curiosity and evoke emotional responses, encouraging individuals to explore and move through the space with intention and curiosity. On the other hand, the principle of *movement* was interpreted as transforming the community and fostering new approaches and connections within it. This notion aims to make the outcomes of the artistic activities accessible to everyone in a democratic manner.

## Tools employed

At its core, the Garden Caretaker itself serves as a unique tool within the project, embodying an art-based approach to transforming existing urban spaces and creating new neighbourhoods. Interestingly, the diverse artistic practices were not solely about creating traditional artworks but rather served as tools for sensing and exploring the site's unique qualities and histories. Each artist, during their residency, enabled participants to engage deeply with the surroundings through workshops, landscape walks, and participatory activities.



The first artist, an author and poet, conducted workshops in April 2023, focusing on her method of mindfulness. She explored how text and writing can serve as tools to enhance and expand participants' awareness of the natural world. The second artist, a multidisciplinary artist specialising in living sculpture and performance, took part in his residency in August. He focussed on exploring the deep history of the site through walk'n'talk sessions, and collecting materials found in the area, such as stones, he created new narratives about the site (Figure 3). He also manipulated these elements, employing techniques like engraving markings into the stones, before reintegrating them into the landscape. The resulting artefacts were intended to spark curiosity and speculation among their origin and meaning among future discoverers.



*Figure 3 The second Garden Caretaker in the Greenhouse exploring the area's geological history with local stakeholders through materials found on the site. Photo credits Siv Werner.*

The third artist, who inhabited the site in September, created immersive listening experiences by curating environments that invited participants to engage with various objects producing intriguing sounds. Participants were encouraged to immerse themselves in these sounds, fostering an emotional connection and deeper engagement with their surroundings. The fourth artist specialises in ceramics and works primarily with natural, locally-sourced clay and soil to craft his artworks. His residency involved a series of workshops that aimed at co-creating a perishable artwork in collaboration with children from the local kindergarten. Over a few weeks, the children were invited into the droplet to mould bricks from rammed earth. In the end, they used them to set up a temporary installation that naturally decomposes over time, returning to the earth from which it originated (Figure 4).



*Figure 4 Perishable bricks moulded from sand, clay and soil from the area. Photo credits Hanne Kokkegaard.*

The fifth and final Garden Caretaker, a performance duo specialising in body and landscape interaction, undertook their residency titled ‘Daily Fiction’ from February to March 2024. During their residency, they curated participatory audio walks and organised a film screening for university students and construction workers at the site (Figure 5). Additionally, they orchestrated a dance and performance event on the construction ground.



*Figure 5. On a sound walk with the final Garden Caretaker in Herlev. Photo credits Hanne Kokkegård.*

## Learnings & reflections

Through the course of the project, the site had several key learnings: First, having a well-defined framework from the beginning was instrumental in guiding the project's direction and ensuring that all artistic interventions aligned with the overarching goals. Second, initial difficulties in scheduling workshops and engaging participants were countered by building relationships and collaborations with local institutions. Being physically present in the area was crucial for building these relationships and connections to the local community. The partnerships that were formed increased workshop participation and extended the use of artistic tools and methods beyond the project, enriching the practices of local stakeholders within their own contexts. Third, inviting people to hands-on, tangible initiatives where they had to do something rather than merely think sparked curiosity and fostered engagement that was deemed important. For this, a good knowledge about the desired target group and their needs was considered important so that the activities could be shaped accordingly. Fourth, the site has observed that artists play an important role as 'resonance creators', facilitating pure and emotionally evocative experiences through their artistic practices. These experiences inspire connections among participants and the place, fostering a sense of inspiration and engagement. Testimonials from participants also revealed that the artistic interventions led to feelings of peace and deep connection to the place. However, the two-week residency periods were deemed too short to fully achieve the full desired impact. Extending these periods in future iterations is expected to enhance the project's outcomes even more.

## Future plans

As more residents settle into the neighbourhood, the Garden Caretaker Project is negotiating to extend the project's duration and incorporating fresh perspectives from new artists. Central to these plans is the proposal to lengthen residency periods, affording artists more extensive opportunities to deeply engage with both the physical site and the community to foster richer artistic exploration and strengthen the project's impact on local dynamics. In relation to this, the site aims to broaden community involvement by collaborating even more closely with local institutions and potential new residents. Another objective is to organise a final group exhibition that will capture the Garden Caretaker Project's journey from its beginnings to its current stage and demonstrate the project's evolution in artistic exploration and community engagement over time. Additionally, the project team is actively working with developers to ensure that the lessons learned from the Garden Caretaker Project are incorporated into ongoing and future development plans for the site.

## 2.2 Cascina Falchera, Turin, Italy

### Context

Cascina Falchera is an old farmhouse from 1701 located in the North of Turin, which is used as an educational area. It is seen as a Common Good of the City of Turin and was granted to the Kairòs Consortium until 2040 by ITER (Turin Institution for Responsible Education), with the aim of enhancing its educational vocation and transforming it into a biodiversity hub. Cascina Falchera re-opened in May 2023 and has since been running diverse projects, ideas, and events for children, families, elderly and local residents. The local partner sees opportunities for further exploring what the renovated farm could become and how to build its new identity with the local community and ecology. Within the Desire project, Cascina Falchera's main focus is water. In particular, it seeks assistance with 'the irresistible cycle', a waterways re-constitution project focusing on the 'bealere' system, meaning small streams of water that bordered the farmsteads in Piemonte.

### Process

In this context, Cascina Falchera conducted a workshop series for citizens focused on the role of wetlands in Turin's history and their future potential to mitigate the effects of climate change while opening up new development possibilities at Cascina Falchera. Cascina Falchera's vision is to regenerate the area through circularity principles and support the local community, especially the young generations, in reconnecting with natural spaces, biodiversity and historical and environmental values of the site. The broad aim within Desire was to build a biodiversity hub that promotes environmental sustainability and social innovation. This concept was not initially planned but emerged from a participatory process involving internal staff, stakeholders, and users in Cascina Falchera. This hub is supposed to comprise five elements: a community centre, research and experimentation, landscape protection, training, and cultural initiatives. In relation to the physical space and infrastructures, Cascina Falchera strives to foster small-scale solutions generated by a community of young people between 15-29 years that collaboratively explore what the site ought to be. Within Desire, Cascina Falchera is working with three different principles: 1)



*Biodiversity* to demonstrate the possibilities for sustainable and green transformation for the local and water management system and to enhance the full potential of endogenous resources; 2) *aesthetics* to jointly design a mixed plan of functions and services that can guide the transformation and help shape a new perception of the site; and 3) *belonging* to activate pathways of active citizenship among young people, families, elderly, and residents, and to promote a culture of reciprocity, proximity and responsibility in co-creating the site.

#### Tools employed

Cascina Falchera primarily employed participatory workshops as tools. The project began with a ‘water saving camp’ – a series of workshops facilitated by an external facilitator between June and October 2023, each corresponding to one of their core principles, with a total number of ten participants. Initially, the workshop series failed to engage the target demographic of young people aged 15 to 29, posing a frustrating setback and prompting discussions among the organisers on how to improve future events. The solution emerged from a desire to empower young individuals and make them feel like protagonists in the process. As a result, the organisers extended invitations to various young stakeholders, including an early career researcher specialising in canal studies from an anthropological perspective, another early career researcher from Politecnico di Torino aiming to test a new master plan model for Cascina Falchera through qualitative research, and a young couple residing in Falchera keen on providing tangible support for neighbourhood development.

The first workshop focused on nature-based solutions, aligned with the Desire principle of *biodiversity*. It was held in a small corner of Cascina Falchera's courtyard, and aimed at elevating the local ecosystem by 1) facilitating the return of rainwater to its natural cycle by removing impermeable surfaces, and 2) planting a variety of flowers to promote the flourishing pollinators (Figure 6).





Figure 6 Water Saving Camp, July 2023. Photo credit Marzia Allietta.

The second workshop focused on the topic of urban exploration. Linked to the Desire principle of *belonging*, the workshop was designed to promote an active knowledge of the place and neighbourhood through action research with young adults. The workshop was dedicated to collecting data and information from the landscape, particularly focusing on recording the soundscapes of nature. These recordings will be used to create a soundtrack featuring the sounds of the site, with a special emphasis on the water.

Aligned with the principle of *aesthetics*, the third workshop focused on ‘city branding’ and sought to improve communication strategies and tools to enhance the narrative of Cascina Falchera. Participants were encouraged to share their impressions and perspectives on the site. By employing storytelling techniques, the narratives generated during the workshop will be utilised to create a podcast series and video content aimed at promoting Cascina Falchera.

The concluding workshop featured a collective brainstorming session focused on generating ideas for future events. One notable concept that surfaced was hosting a site-specific art residency. Additionally, Cascina Falchera aspires to integrate diverse perspectives from various stakeholders, including young people, families, the elderly, and residents, through qualitative interviews aimed at eliciting a range of needs and ideas regarding the functions of the space.

In October 2023, another workshop series began, as part of an action-research process involving researchers from Politecnico di Milano, together with Consorzio Kairòs, and Cascina Falchera, as well as individuals from previous workshops, all focused on the objective of ‘Designing a Biodiversity Hub’. The first round of activities consisted of desk



research to understand the key concept of biodiversity and a workshop dedicated to mapping the existing offer of Cascina Falchera. Thereafter, twenty on-site interviews with users and residents were conducted, providing valuable insights into the needs and perspectives of these stakeholders. A finding was the wish to enhance accessibility and openness of Cascina Falchera to external parties and the local community. The second workshop focused on crafting a compelling value proposition, using a value proposition canvas<sup>1</sup> to delve into the relationship between offers and customer profiles of Cascina Falchera. The third workshop engaged stakeholders and internal staff in the collaborative development of ideas and proposals for new activities within the broader framework of the biodiversity hub initiative. In these workshops, Cascina Falchera benefited from the expertise of Politecnico di Milano. They guided them through the various phases of service mapping and profiling, as well as their aspiration to bring order within the perceived chaos of activities at Cascina: it is now clear what they want to be and how they want to narrate their story.

Another 2-day workshop, facilitated by AGORA<sup>2</sup>, focused on developing a new concept for an artistic residency within Cascina Falchera. Participants were a group of twelve young people who created an inspiring manifesto based on the three chosen Desire principles for the future artists in Cascina. Additionally, the workshop aimed to foster a sense of co-ownership among the stakeholders, aligning with the Desire principle of *belonging*. Participation was encouraged through the provision of a fee for each participant. The workshop ensured that every participant had an opportunity to voice their vision and contribute solutions to the overarching design of Cascina Falchera. Unexpected outcomes included the recruitment of a new volunteer with a background in biology, who will contribute to agricultural activities. Additionally, a student from Politecnico di Turin has proposed a thesis project, further enhancing collaborative opportunities and knowledge exchange within the community.

## Learnings & reflections

The legacy of the project is closely tied to the biodiversity hub, which aims to transition from the old concept of Cascina Falchera as an educational farm to a new identity as a living lab. While the project partners do not have a clear strategy for building evidence, they recognize the importance of engaging the community and neighborhood by listening and collecting ideas and proposals from various users. The project partners have identified the need to improve internal procedures, particularly regarding lifelong learning for internal staff. Therefore, they are working with the Human Resource Office to establish standard procedures for internal training, ensuring staff can dedicate the necessary time and effort to the project.

## Future plans

During a Spring Party on March 23rd 2024, participants presented their manifesto and organized a small artistic exhibition, launching a new open call for a residence programme for visual artists aged between 25 and 35. This initiative aims to connect art with nature, as suggested by young adults during the water-saving camp, and increase youth participation through artistic expressions. The selected artist will begin their residency in June, continuing

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.strategyzer.com/library/the-value-proposition-canvas>

<sup>2</sup> Subcontracted to deliver a digital citizens engagement tool, named 'Our Walk App'



until mid-July. The focal theme will be water within the broader context of biodiversity. The objectives for this residency encompass exploring novel functions and experiences at Cascina Falchera, enhancing youth engagement through artistic expression, and strengthening the sense of belonging among users. Other areas Cascina Falchera aims to work on is improving internal and external communication, such as the website, which serves as the interface between Cascina Falchera and its users. Cascina Falchera is collaborating with Polifactory, the Fablab of Politecnico di Milano, who will provide training for Cascina Falchera educators on innovative activities that align with Cascina Falchera's updated offerings. These activities will include a biodiversity monitoring program, involving the setup of digital devices to map the flora and fauna of Cascina Falchera through sounds and pictures, as well as foraging experiences, among others.

## 2.3 BTC City, Ljubljana, Slovenia

### Context

Originally a warehouse, BTC City Ljubljana today is one of the largest business, shopping, entertainment and cultural centres in Central Europe, attracting around 21 million visitors annually. The area covers 475,000 square metres and comprises 32 buildings offering space for 450 shops, 70 dining establishments, and various cultural and leisure facilities. BTC faces various climate change challenges, including heat islands; traffic congestion; limited public transport accessibility; building energy inefficiency; waste management; and a lack of green social spaces. As a response, BTC City started to initiate various initiatives to promote more environmentally friendly practices and collaborative partnerships. Among these initiatives are, for example, the cultivation of a green community through initiatives such as the 'Green Community BTC City' and 'Green Star Club'<sup>3</sup>, which aim to foster engagement, collaboration, and awareness among stakeholders and contribute to shaping a collective sustainability vision for BTC. Within the framework of Desire, BTC City aspires to create a greener and more climate-resilient business district. As such, the project partners initiated different initiatives, primarily focused on urban greening and sustainability. Within the Desire project, BTC City works with the principles of *belonging*, *movement*, and *biodiversity*. The selection of principles emerged with the project. BTC started with focusing on *movement* and *belonging* as this connected with their ambition of including stakeholders. As their efforts turned towards working on a sustainable vision and strategy the principle of *biodiversity* became important. Moreover, as the expert organization GXN became involved, principles of *aesthetics* and *circularity* became relevant too – to summarise, the principles are viewed as interconnected.

### Process

In the beginning of the process, BTC City conducted a stakeholder mapping to identify key stakeholders that should be engaged in the process. In May 2023, BTC City organised its first co-creation workshop, which was attended by around twenty experts from academia, the

<sup>3</sup> Green Star is the first certificate for the successful introduction of sustainable - ESG principles and climate action in business operations. It rewards and highlights companies that follow the path of green transformation. It is also a strategic tool that collects all relevant information for a company in one place for a green transformation. (<https://www.green-star.si/>)



creative industry and non-governmental organisations. The overarching goal was to develop a sustainable vision for BTC City in 2050 (Figure 7). Participants were invited to engage with the principles of ownership, responsibility and accountability and explore the myriad possibilities they bring. Suggestions ranged from transforming BTC into the region's first commercial-free shopping centre to imagining an autonomous city region or expanding from a consumption-oriented to a production-oriented city.



*Figure 7. Visioning workshop. Photo credits Anže Krže.*

The second workshop convened 25 of BTC's business partners to discuss their roles in shaping a sustainable future for BTC. In contrast to the first workshop, the second session produced fewer far-reaching and imaginative ideas but was more focused on energy efficiency, mobility, buildings, and renewables. According to BTC, this can be linked to the familiarity of all business partners within BTC's operating landscape, which led them to focus predominantly on solving current challenges rather than envisioning future scenarios. BTC City found it difficult to engage partners in forward-looking initiatives, as their attention remained focused on immediate problems. From June to September 2023, BTC held eight one-on-one meetings with members of the Green Star Club to engage in dialogues about

common challenges and opportunities. BTC listened to partners' concerns and aspirations and sought common ground for future projects to strengthen cohesion within the green community. In November 2023, BTC City launched a greening campaign and planted 72 trees in BTC City as well as heat-resistant plants and vertical gardens to create green islands and mitigate summer temperatures and stormwater runoff, benefiting both human and non-human species such as bees and other important pollinators (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Photos from the results of the greening activities in 2023. Photo credits BTC City.

To promote international dialogue and partnership, BTC hosted a conference on urban decarbonisation in January 2024. The conference presented pilot projects and innovative partnerships to stimulate collective action to achieve decarbonisation goals, and was attended by local and foreign experts and stakeholders.

In February 2024, BTC organised a hackathon titled 'Developing a common sustainable vision BTC City 2050'<sup>4</sup>. During the hackathon, 30 young people, divided into six groups, worked together for 48-hour to find ideas for innovative services based on sustainable principles within BTC City. Based on the chosen Desire principles, i.e., *belonging*, *movement*, and *biodiversity*, participants iteratively developed ideas, gathered feedback from visitors, and received advice from local and foreign mentors who supported the participants in developing their concepts. At the end of the event, the teams presented their solutions to a jury of experts, who awarded prizes to the three best ideas. Reflecting on the process, BTC highlights the importance of prioritising collective learning and collaboration over competition.

In May 2024, BTC City carried out another greening project on an area of around 12,000 square metres, in which 270 trees and various shrubs from 20 different species were planted. The aim was to improve the microclimate, manage rainwater drainage and increase the comfort and well-being of visitors.

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<https://www.btc.si/en/news/2024/02/innovative-and-sustainable-vision-btc-city-2050-designed-by-young-people/>

## Tools employed

BTC's project partners employed a variety of tools. Among them was, for example, stakeholder mapping to identify and engage key stakeholders crucial for advancing sustainability goals. One of more prominent tools employed within this project were co-creation workshops conducted with various stakeholders such as experts from diverse backgrounds, business partners, and other stakeholders, held to foster both collaborative visioning and strategic planning. In addition to the larger-scale workshops, project partners conducted a series of one-on-one meetings with the Green Start Club members to elicit an open dialogue on shared challenges and aspirations. Lastly, to foster creativity and bring in fresh perspectives and unconventional ideas to developing a sustainable vision, BTC organised a hackathon for young people.

## Learnings & reflections

Looking back on its initiatives, BTC City emphasised the importance of stakeholder involvement and interdisciplinary collaboration. Workshops with experts from bioengineering and architectural disciplines proved invaluable in designing effective greening strategies. Feedback from stakeholders, including businesses and non-governmental organisations, underlined the importance of biodiversity and the aesthetic appeal of urban greening projects. Another key finding was the empowerment of employees as 'green agents'. This initiative aimed to integrate sustainability practices into the different areas of BTC City to ensure a holistic implementation of green strategies. The success of these efforts was emphasised by the positive feedback and active involvement of sustainability managers and partners.

## Future plans

Additional urban greening strategies are continuously being developed through workshops with GXN and other partners and include short-term solutions such as green buildings and shading options as well as long-term visions for sustainable development throughout BTC City. The aim is to create a recognisable green identity and set new standards for climate change adaptation in retail and commercial areas. Looking ahead, BTC City plans to finalise its strategy for greening the city by September 2024. In addition, BTC plans a centre for sustainable innovation, which is supposed to bring together efforts in sustainability education, innovation and community engagement. BTC City intends to utilise existing partnerships and networks to support current and future sustainability initiatives that are aligned with regional and European climate goals.

## 2.4 Gadehavegaard, Høje-Taastrup, Denmark

### Context

Gadehavegaard, located in Høje-Taastrup, about 20 kilometres from Copenhagen, is a large social housing neighbourhood with 986 apartments from the 1970s. It will undergo a significant transformation aimed at promoting social inclusion, biodiversity, and circularity. The area, managed by the housing administration company Domea and the housing



association DFB, is set to be redeveloped by 2030. This redevelopment will include the demolition and renovation of social housing, the construction of new housing for the elderly and private owners, and the establishment of institutions such as a campus area and a neighbourhood centre. The redevelopment aims to integrate Gadehavegaard more closely with its surroundings, creating a 30,000 square metre park by removing large car parks and a four-lane road. Within Desire, the site representatives decided to focus on *circularity* and *biodiversity*. They felt these principles were essential to highlight at this stage of their transformation and to engage their stakeholders effectively. Whilst mainly concentrating on *circularity* and *biodiversity*, they hoped the other principles would also naturally follow in their planned process.

## Process

The redevelopment process has involved various participatory activities, particularly focused on engaging young people. For instance, theme weeks were organised for pupils of a school located in the neighbourhood. During these weeks, students were introduced to concepts of urban design, and the principles of circularity and biodiversity. They were encouraged to envision and design their ideas for the future park area. Working in groups, they used methods like idea development, photography, drawing, and model building to articulate and create prototypes of their visions of the park (Figure 9). These visions were showcased in a design exhibition, which allowed the mayor, parents, representatives from the housing organisation, and the municipality, to see and provide feedback on the students' ideas, fostering a community dialogue about the neighbourhood's future. Additionally, students developed a manifesto and seven principles to guide the park's development, inspired by their research and interviews with local citizens.



Figure 9. Theme weeks for students in Gadehavegaard September 2023. Credit Benjamin Hesselholdt.

## Tools employed

Several innovative tools and methodologies were employed to facilitate this inclusive planning process. A ‘Think it, Sketch it, Show it’ toolkit allowed children to transform their visions into tangible urban designs. After that, the design studio GXN (part of the Desire consortium) developed digital models, which brought the children’s ideas to life in a virtual environment. In addition, Our Walk App<sup>5</sup> was used to collect 'soft data' in the city, gathering nuanced insights from residents about their experiences and needs. Furthermore, a tender program was developed based on the students’ manifesto, the New European Bauhaus values (sustainability, inclusion, aesthetics), and the principles of *biodiversity* and *circularity*.

## Learnings & reflections

The engagement with young people during the theme weeks highlighted the importance of involving future generations in the design and planning of their local environment. The students felt listened to and valued, contributing ideas that ranged from peaceful greenhouses to vibrant playgrounds and community spaces. The project demonstrated that when given the opportunity, young people can offer innovative solutions that resonate with the community's needs. The feedback from the resident board members, who found the children’s proposals both exciting and practical, reinforced the potential for such participatory processes to yield valuable insights. Continuous reflections focused on how to maintain strong relationships with local actors, keep a focus on biodiversity and circularity, and ensure stakeholder empowerment.

## Future plans

The successful involvement of young people in the theme weeks has set a precedent for future participatory initiatives in Gadehavegaard. Domea.dk (partner in the Desire consortium) and DFB<sup>6</sup> aim to maintain and expand this engagement, using the children as ambassadors to involve more citizens in the neighbourhood’s transformation. Future plans include continuous involvement of the students in new projects, ensuring their ideas and feedback remain integral to the development process. The broader objective is to create a sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant urban space that caters to diverse needs and fosters a strong sense of community. The project aims to serve as a model for other neighbourhoods, demonstrating the benefits of inclusive and innovative urban planning practices. The tender program, currently in its final stages, will be tested and refined to ensure it meets the project’s objectives. There are also plans to develop activities that maintain focus on the park’s development, biodiversity, and circularity, even as the project progresses toward its 2028 realisation date. The ultimate goal is to create a sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant urban space that serves as a model for other neighbourhoods.

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<sup>5</sup> Developed by AGORA (subcontracted)

<sup>6</sup> Danske Funktionærers Boligselskab, a housing association which is part of Domea.dk, although not involved directly in activities in Desire.



## 2.5 Ziepju, Riga, Latvia

### Context

As part of Desire, Riga municipality is focusing on the renovation of the Ziepju 11 housing block, a municipally owned Soviet-era apartment complex (Figure 10). Built in 1970 as a service hotel, the five-story brick and panel building has been empty since 2018. In 2018, the decision was made to rebuild it into a multi-apartment residential building. The project aims to transform a neglected building into an attractive, green urban space, serving as a model for the renovation of approximately 6,000 similar housing blocks in Riga, most of which are privately owned and in poor condition. The refurbished building is supposed to house families with physical and mental disabilities, and the ground level will host various social services and community centres, forming a symbiotic relationship between different groups. Within Desire, the site's representatives chose to focus on the principles of *aesthetics, biodiversity and belonging*.



Figure 10. Ziepju 11, the social housing block in Riga, Latvia. Credits Benjamin Hesselholdt.

### Process

The renovation process involves active citizen participation, which is a novel approach for Riga. In August, the municipality organised workshops for the residents of the neighbouring apartment block to ask them for ideas on how to transform the outdoor area into an attractive, green urban space where people can be together. Children, young people, adults and older people all took part (Figure 11).





*Figure 11. Various outdoor space mapping workshops with students and residents were organised to elicit their vision for the housing block. Credit for first photo on the left: Rudis Rubenis, credits for photos on the right and bottom: Benjamin Hesselholdt.*

The participatory approach is intended to change the community's mentality from reliance on centralised systems to active engagement in creating their own living environment. These workshops have demonstrated that residents are willing to participate and contribute valuable insights when given a voice, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. In addition, a procurement process was initiated to engage designers for the redesign of the building and surrounding areas. Six designers applied, expressing interest in revitalising the complex. However, the process has faced delays and communication challenges, particularly in conveying the intricacies of the procurement format to various stakeholders such as legislative entities, lawyers, and designers. Furthermore, project partners aimed to kickstart an urban gardening initiative as a means of fostering community engagement prior to the official renovation. This initiative sought to utilise existing urban spaces for gardening activities, providing residents with a proactive role in shaping their environment. However, discussions with stakeholders, including workers from a local daycare centre for disabled individuals, revealed concerns regarding accessibility. Issues such as uneven pavement posed barriers to wheelchair users, while the need for consistent environmental arrangements was critical for residents with mental disabilities. Instead, territory concept plans were developed as part of the ongoing efforts. This mapping practice involves extensive analysis and engagement with users to envision outdoor spaces within each neighbourhood context. These plans were crafted based on the discussions and workshops with the various stakeholders to ensure that their diverse perspectives – ranging from children to seniors – are considered.

### Tools employed

To facilitate this process, several tools were employed. Outdoor space mapping workshops were held to collect visual and auditory resident input and facilitate discussions about the renovation plans. Workshops and meetings, surveys and questionnaires were used to gather detailed feedback, while visual aids such as maps (see Figure 11 above) helped residents visualise the proposed changes and contribute with ideas. Additionally, community engagement platforms were used for continuous communication with residents throughout the project.

### Learnings & reflections

The project has highlighted several key learnings and reflections. Overcoming initial scepticism required persistent engagement and demonstrating the tangible benefits of the renovation. The active involvement of residents in the design process led to innovative ideas and a stronger sense of community ownership. Clear, consistent communication was essential to build trust and encourage resident participation, addressing concerns and providing regular updates on the project's progress. Changing the deeply ingrained mindset of reliance on centralised services to one of proactive community involvement was challenging but achievable with persistent effort. Additionally, challenges emerged when trying to communicate the new procurement format to different stakeholders such as municipality departments, lawyers, designers.

### Future plans

Future plans for the Ziepju 11 block include completing the renovation within the next 3-4 years, transforming the basement into an after-school facility, and creating communal outdoor spaces to enhance community interaction. The project aims to serve as a model for other housing blocks in Riga, encouraging more widespread adoption of similar renovation efforts.



Successful implementation is expected to inspire other residents to form associations and undertake renovations, fostering a city-wide green transition. The transformation of Ziepjū 11 is poised to serve as an exemplary model for sustainable and inclusive urban redevelopment in Riga, fostering a greener, more engaged community.

## 2.6 Wildemanbuurt, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

### Context

The Wildemanbuurt is a post-war social housing neighbourhood of poor quality, built in the 1950s, and situated in the Nieuw-West area of Amsterdam. Initially, the area attracted residents seeking spacious living within a green environment. In the 1970s it saw a demographic shift, becoming predominantly inhabited by immigrants of non-western origin. Currently, it accommodates approximately 5,000 residents, mostly big families with a notable proportion of elderly (around 12%) and young inhabitants (around 40% under 30 years old). Wildemanbuurt faces various challenges such as a relatively high crime rate and prevalent poverty among its residents. Many residents feel a sense of neglect from municipal and social housing authorities, due to unfulfilled promises and plans made over the years. Since 2023, the redevelopment of the neighbourhood is in progress. Some of the apartment blocks have been demolished. It is not transparent what will happen to the space and to the people that will have to move out. Some citizen dialogues were scheduled by the municipality and the housing corporations to engage in a dialogue with local citizens about future housing and the living environment in general. The situation is complicated and dominated by strong opposite opinions, intransparency on goals and planning on the parts from the municipality, and a situation where various groups are not represented equally. As a result, one significant challenge in Wildeman is the deeply rooted and mutual distrust between citizens and formal institutions, including the municipality. Furthermore, within the community itself, various groups harbour distrust towards each other, leading to a reluctance to communicate or collaborate. Relationships and conflicts are strained, and external pressures, such as area development plans, poverty, lack of opportunities, and limited space, exacerbate this tension. The redevelopment of housing is accompanied by the redevelopment of public spaces, aligning with both sustainable development goals and social objectives. Various social issues, including poverty, health, and waste management, are intertwined in Wildeman. Addressing these challenges requires integrated approaches, which pose a significant challenge for formal institutions due to their compartmentalised nature. However, residents living amidst these issues inherently understand their interconnectedness. Therefore, the primary inquiry arises: How can residents of Wildeman take on leadership and ownership in shaping the neighbourhood's development for the forthcoming decades? What strategies can facilitate this? To achieve this, the project partners, The Beach and Samenwonen-Samenleven (SW-SL), collaborate with citizens and local authorities, devising strategies for creating environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive spaces and processes within the community. There are several initiatives in the Wildeman neighbourhood, organised by local organisations and/or citizens. One such initiative is WeShare<sup>7</sup>, where residents and organisations collaborate on projects to strengthen the neighbourhood. In the larger New-West area, the 'Kracht van New-West' initiative was started, which is an informal

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thebeach.nu/nl/page/7981/weshare>



platform of civic initiatives that aims to bridge the gap between top-down policies and citizen engagement. It includes residents' councils, meet & match events, and a civic design community to empower citizens and connect them with policymaking processes, injecting the latter with bottom-up input. This initiative works with the 'National Plan Together New-West', a top-down national program aimed at long-term transitions in sustainability, housing, and education.

## Process

The Desire project in Wildeman follows the principles of *belonging* and *movement*, striving to foster community through design activities that bring diverse residents together and empower individuals with the resources needed to drive positive change in their community. The aim is to cultivate a neighbourhood that is co-created, reflecting the values and aspirations of all its residents. The project launched in November 2022, with events to explore neighbourhood issues together with the residents. As a result, various resident-led thematic working groups were formed, called 'Design & Do groups' (ODG), named, for example, 'Green & Happy', 'Healthy Connections', and 'Neighborhood economy'. The 'Green and Happy' ODG works to revitalise a community garden with resident and occasional municipal collaboration (Figure 12). The 'Tea Garden' ODG transformed a grey area into a green meeting space to foster collaboration among stakeholders. The 'Healthy Connections' ODG aims to shift from a 'me' to a 'we' mentality, hosting a 'Health Café' and launching a local newspaper. Another ODG, called 'Peaceful Neighborhood', invited the youth organisation 'Y.O.U.' (Young Osdorp United)<sup>8</sup> to collaborate with local residents in creating a more social, sustainable, and safe neighbourhood. In April 2023, a meeting was organised to outline a civic design process as a framework for collaboration among the ODGs. Notably, every activity that is running within the ODG's generated new ideas and initiatives, raising questions about how all these spin offs can be supported. Wildeman is now initiating a green coalition that includes local residents, community initiatives, the municipality, and housing cooperatives. They aim for this coalition to be recognized as a vital initiative within the neighbourhood. In addition to numerous human-centred projects, Wildeman is also exploring how to address non-human concerns. Specifically, they are looking to connect with initiatives in the Netherlands that focus on these issues, such as 'Zoöp,' an organisational model designed to facilitate cooperation between human and non-human life, safeguarding the interests of all forms of life<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youngosdorpunited.nl/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/projects/zoop>





*Figure 12. Photos from the partner meeting and a walk around Wildemanbuurt, May 2023. Urban gardening and green spaces. Credits Hanne Kokkegaard.<sup>10</sup>*

## Tools employed

The Beach and SW-SL is considered a (living) civic design tool in itself, actively facilitating collaborative efforts among stakeholders. Beyond simply sharing knowledge, networks, and expertise, the project partners provide practical co-design tools and organise workshops to support the co-design process within Wildeman. This support takes various forms, such as equipping the group with the necessary co-design capacities, or initiating concrete sharing moments among existing organisations in the area. For example, in April 2023, a meeting was held to introduce the civic design process to the ODGs. During this session, participants engaged in hands-on activities, including tinkering with and assembling six puzzle pieces representing different components of the civic design process.

Midway through the project, some ODGs expressed a need for reflection, a more democratic distribution of funds, and a desire to be heard more effectively. The project partners also recognized the need to re-establish trust and collaboration among various groups. To address this, an ODG exchange session was organised during a dinner in a neutral space, designed with both practical and emotional aims. The practical aims focused on increasing understanding and alignment regarding future plans, summarising plans through mapping and drawing activities, and incorporating reflections and insights from previous workshops, emphasising the importance of a flexible agenda, taking turns, timing, and maintaining quietude. The emotional aims strived to foster a positive spirit, pride, and togetherness among

<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from

<https://www.irresistiblecircularity.eu/news/creating-social-and-inclusive-housing-in-amsterdam>

participants, with the overall goal of building a deeper sense of community, collaboration, wellbeing, and engagement, ensuring all voices were heard and valued. The session began with participants sitting in a circle, where each ODG had five minutes to present their progress using a format of their choice. Following the presentations, participants contributed their thoughts on successes, improvements, concerns, and opportunities using sticky notes on a wall-mounted matrix. After a reflective activity and a break, the group reviewed some reflections and concluded with a drawing activity. Participants, divided into two groups, created roadmaps outlining their goals for the end of the Desire project and beyond. The outcomes included summaries of the ODG projects and two detailed roadmaps and scenarios outlining long-term visions for Desire and the ODG projects. These roadmaps serve as vision documents expressing collective goals such as fostering happiness in the neighbourhood, discovering uniqueness through connectivity, being committed and unified, earning money through initiatives, and strengthening resident ownership to contribute positively to the neighbourhood. Clear follow-up actions were identified, too, including discussing budget redistribution, pitching projects to the Amsterdam municipality, and forming working and action groups to support community wealth-building efforts. A unified voice emerged among the individual ODG groups, highlighting the importance of collaboration and developing an umbrella cooperation to encompass multiple initiatives. Enthusiasm was regained among participants, though some frustration regarding budget issues remained, indicating a need for continued attention to this matter.

As a major ongoing issue in Wildeman is the lack of trust, the project partners organised a trust workshop to help rebuild it. The workshop focused on two main questions: (1) What can you do to keep others in the group safe? (2) What can you do to support the people, the neighbourhood, and Amsterdam more? Participants collectively established a set of guiding principles, including lovingness, prioritising relationships, reciprocity, genuine curiosity, solidarity, and recognizing individual circumstances. They also defined associated actions such as listening attentively, creating space for each other, protecting one another, advocating for justice, selflessly giving, embracing diversity, acting on intuition, and cherishing collaborative efforts.

### Learnings & reflections

Reflections and learnings from the process that strived to empower citizens to take the lead, highlighted the need for a relational approach. The Amsterdam project team captured this in a workshop template to be used by other project sites, emphasising the importance of making these workshops context-specific, honouring stakeholders' feelings, consistently asking for feedback on the workshop design, and including both formal and informal remarks from stakeholders.

Another key learning was allowing enough time for participants to connect informally at the beginning of the workshop to prevent delays and a rushed program. The success of the ODGs was attributed to mutual trust, respect, and genuine interest in each other's initiatives. Despite the evident will and energy in Wildeman, fostering solidarity and trust among community members remains difficult due to deeply ingrained distrust, and requires time and continuous effort to be achieved. As project partners, it is important to demonstrate sincerity through ongoing participation in local initiatives like WeShare and Kracht van Nieuw-West, and collaborating with both local and top-down policy bodies, which helps establish credibility and foster trust.



Another learning was that unleashing civic power is supported by valuing, involving and working with young people and youth-led initiatives to drive community-led movements. Other reflections highlighted that community wealth building entails identifying and nurturing economic activities tailored to the neighbourhood's needs, empowering residents to participate meaningfully in the local economy. In this context, it is considered crucial not to impose practices that may not align with community needs but rather to encourage local entrepreneurship and collaboration while learning from residents.

Another important learning was the need to develop an awareness of different understandings and a unifying vocabulary concerning key concepts, such as desirable change. The project partners explored their different interpretations of these concepts using a table that surfaced the distinct yet interrelated perspectives of SW-SL, The Beach, and Desire/NEB.

### Future plans

Efforts are underway to sustain and improve collaborations formed throughout the process. This includes enhancing interactions within working groups and strengthening partnerships between project partners SW-SL, The Beach, and other NGOs. The ODGs have established collaborations with artists, municipal departments, and media production companies. SW-SL, The Beach, and other NGOs are developing long-term plans for the next 4-6 years. The WeShare platform is evolving into a marketplace format. Meanwhile, Kracht van New-West struggles with collaboration issues with the national program 'Together New-West' and various NGOs. Exploring new infrastructures for collaboration and bottom-up learning is challenging. Many policies advocate for participatory approaches and resident input but often fall short of these principles. In collaboration with the Arts & Culture Department, Wildeman's project partners identified the need for capacity building among local initiators. Many have ideas but lack necessary skills or networks, contributing to the lower budget for arts and culture in New West. Wildeman's project partners aim to address this over the next 4-6 years, with The Beach playing a pivotal role. The Civic Design Toolbox represents a step towards genuine bottom-up approaches, capacity building, and relationship-building. It includes tools for local leaders to become designer-activists using context-specific approaches. The toolbox is being refined into three clusters: 1) Listen, which is about facilitating close encounters by sitting in circles, meeting people in the streets, and practising active listening; 2) Whisper, which focuses on creating settings for conversations, e.g., by gardening together, sharing meals, conducting interviews, singing, dancing, and walking together; and 3) Amplify, which is about sharing and expanding impact, by collaborating on projects, reaching out to partners, building community infrastructures and programs, organising public events, and using media.

## 2.7 Circular Campus, Kalundborg, Denmark

### Context

Kalundborg, Denmark, located 100 km west of Copenhagen, is renowned for its thriving industrial symbiosis model, interconnecting over 20 streams of water, energy, and materials with active participation from public and private stakeholders. Over the past five years, in



line with the Danish Government's strategy to decentralise higher education, Kalundborg's industrial, political, and educational stakeholders have collaborated to attract higher education institutions to the city. In line with the existing circular system, a new Circular Campus is now being developed. In this context, the Royal Academy has been mandated to establish a new architecture program in Kalundborg.

The Circular Campus aims to integrate educational institutions into the local fabric and promote collaboration across sectors and generations. This initiative leverages the proximity of leading companies and vocational schools and aims to foster the active involvement of younger generations in shaping their future environment through co-creation and participation. Stakeholders have also worked on developing plans for the necessary infrastructure and housing to accommodate new students and employees, aiming to create a vibrant urban community that retains residents during and after their academic studies.

However, the strong industry focus in Kalundborg poses challenges in fostering a sense of belonging among students, requiring ongoing efforts and deliberate decisions to connect them with the community. Participatory methods are crucial in this process. The task of finding a 'home' for the education will involve the first architecture students and the community, exploring how the new program can be meaningfully integrated into Kalundborg by listening to citizens and adding new value to the city while respecting the existing community. Within Desire, Kalundborg chose the principles of *aesthetics*, *movement*, and *belonging*.

## Process

One circular strategy already implemented involves the decision of the Royal Academy's new School of Architecture to repurpose existing buildings rather than construct new ones. For instance, it repurposed the local cinema, which remains unused during the daytime, for hosting lectures. This initiative met some resistance from local decision-makers; however, a series of meetings were held with the management team of the local municipality to explore various strategies for the future location of the growing school. Three scenarios were presented and discussed, each varying in the degree of concentration of functions across one or more locations. Planning for another new campus in Kalundborg is underway, with a focus on leveraging the city's robust biotech industry. Desire aims to harness this potential by spearheading the development of a Biotech Campus, which will play an important role in integrating the industry into the city's overall development strategy. As a hub for the Danish biotech industry, Kalundborg anticipates the launch of several new higher education programs in this field in the coming years. Consequently, the new campus needs to accommodate these educational initiatives while ensuring sustainable strategies for both physical construction and social integration within the Kalundborg community. The School of Architecture will play a crucial role in this initiative, conducting research on innovative biogenetic materials to support the campus's development. Workshops and field trips were organised to generate collaboration and knowledge sharing between the various educational institutions in Kalundborg. Another key initiative encompassed establishing a broad network of connections and interdependencies with individuals and institutions within the city. From a broader perspective, the project concerns the urban development of Kalundborg, touching upon topics such as housing, cultural life, and placemaking, which unfolded through the Power of Place approach supported by the Really Regenerative Center (associated partner with Desire) early in the process. With this approach, Kalundborg has seen the formation of the citizen-driven Phoenix Group, from which principles of future development have





emerged rather than being imposed top-down. As part of Desire, the initial step towards forging these connections involved convening local stakeholders who collectively wish to initiate change in Kalundborg and recognize the potential for collaboration with the Royal Academy in workshops and through field trips. The citizens who became part of the group known as ‘the Phoenix Group’ expressed interest in catalysing positive change in Kalundborg.

### Tools employed

The Phoenix Group, which can be considered a tool itself, as it is initiated with a specific approach of being open-minded and focuses on trust building as its initial aim, defined its scope of operation and established rules of conduct, using mind-mapping and dilemma tools. A dilemma tool is a structured exercise that juxtaposes contrasting ideas on a scale, followed by discussions with stakeholders to determine their preferred positions. This facilitated reflections on potential controversies, such as prioritising small versus large projects, short-term initiatives versus permanent development, and municipal leadership versus civil society empowerment. Through this exercise, stakeholders engaged in critical dialogue to navigate complex issues and identify optimal pathways forward. Based on these discussions, the Phoenix Group identified specific projects, focusing on a rectangular block for aesthetic and functional improvements.

Partnering with landscape and architecture firm 3rd Nature<sup>11</sup> and students from the new architecture education program in the city, the Phoenix Group developed proposals for temporary movable installations in five city locations to see if simple elements could create green and cosy places where citizens want to gather. These proposals were presented to local stakeholders in a September 2023 exhibition. In addition, they could also be examined at an Open House event at Kalundborg Station, where the new royal academy of architecture is located, which was attended by many citizens. However, balancing detail with abstraction proved challenging, leading to potential confusion and lack of engagement. Some ideas were quickly transformed into physical installations, such as repurposing old trash containers into movable seats and tree pots (Figure 13). A number of young citizens gave the containers an aesthetic makeover so they could function as plant pots in the city's spaces. Prototypes were tested in various urban contexts to assess their impact. The group also visited other campuses for inspiration.

Recognizing the need for younger perspectives, the architectural education engaged anthropological firm BARK to conduct walk-and-talk sessions and image association workshops with teenagers. Students from various educational backgrounds participated in a ‘Listening to Place’ workshop to quietly gather impressions about the city. Results indicated a lack of attractive, non-commercial gathering spaces, highlighting that Kalundborg does not yet meet its aesthetic and community goals. To strengthen the sense of belonging among younger people, student assignments are contextualised within the local environment, offering opportunities to engage with and instigate change. This approach aligns with the Phoenix Group’s efforts, which, following the third Desire principle of *movement*, pursue bottom-up change within the local context, independent of municipal involvement.

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<sup>11</sup> Subcontracted through DanskeArk, part of the Desire consortium.





*Figure 13. Repurposed old trash containers into movable seats and tree pots. Photo credits Benjamin Hesselholdt.*

## Learnings & reflections

The site's representative's reflections suggest that there may be a tendency among some industry players in Kalundborg to focus on global market interests, which could sometimes overshadow local needs. Similarly, it seems the municipality often prioritises the wellbeing of the industry. As a response, it might be beneficial to consider redirecting some attention inward to better address local issues and enhance community resilience and development. The challenge within Desire is to facilitate this shift in perspective. A key learning from the project has been the critical role of relationships in driving meaningful change. Prioritising dialogue and collaboration across stakeholder groups, including establishing forums for shared decision-making, is essential for holistic development aligned with circularity and community engagement principles. Collaboration at higher decision-making levels, such as within the municipality, has also proven challenging. There is a prevailing lack of interest in experimentation and a stronger focus on expediency, posing difficulties for Desire's approach, which advocates exploring new, experimental methodologies. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding of the significance of Desire's experimental initiatives. Desire also faced challenges due to the late involvement of stakeholders from the Royal Academy, who joined during the experimentation phase. Their primary focus on designing education programs has overshadowed their commitment to the Desire project.

## Future plans

Moving forward, the project plans to further integrate the Circular Campus with Kalundborg's urban dynamics. This includes expanding community engagement efforts, continuing interdisciplinary research collaborations, and enhancing the physical and social infrastructure necessary to support a vibrant, sustainable urban community. Efforts will also focus on empowering local stakeholders, including initiatives like the Phoenix Group, to autonomously drive ongoing urban improvements beyond the project's initial phases.

## 2.8 MIND, Milano, Italy

### Context

MIND (Milan Innovation District) is a project originating from Expo 2015 in Milan, initially focused on food. Covering 1 million square metres in the North-West periphery of Milan, it represents a major regeneration effort through a public-private partnership. This partnership involves a 99-year concession between the public entity Arexpo and the private developer Lendlease. In 2017, Lendlease secured the Masterplan and began construction in 2018. With a total investment of 4.5 billion euros, the development is expected to be completed by 2031, over a 15-year period. Formerly a brownfield with no community, the area around MIND is now home to various business communities. Once complete, MIND aims to attract 16-17 million visitors daily. The district will include residential areas, a student campus, and commercial establishments. Key stakeholders on the site include the Human Technopole Foundation, Italy's premier life sciences research institute, the Galeazzi – Sant'Ambrogio Research Hospital, the University of Milan (Statale di Milano), the Polytechnic University of Milan (Politecnico di Milano), the Triulza Foundation, and a Federated Innovation consortium of 44 companies.

### Process

In the first phase of Desire, MIND, together with PoliMi and Lendlease, explored the most meaningful focus areas, ultimately deciding to operate on three Desire principles: *aesthetics*, *belonging*, and *movement*. For *aesthetics*, MIND aims to prompt reflection on the broader concept of beauty and investigate how aesthetics can enhance a space, seeking fresh and unexpected insights. Surveys distributed to key stakeholders, including Valore Italia (School of Fine Arts Restoration), have provided valuable input on perspectives related to aesthetics. Regarding *belonging*, despite evolving from a pre-Expo 2015 brownfield to a hub with around 1,000 daily visitors, MIND lacks a strong sense of community. It is perceived as a distant workplace, difficult to access due to infrastructural barriers and ongoing construction. MIND is committed to exploring factors that foster a sense of belonging, addressing obstacles related to mobility and accessibility, and improving infrastructure and wayfinding to facilitate connection and identity. Strategies include designing navigable spaces, fostering familiarity and comfort, and creating a culture where everyone feels heard and valued. For *movement*, MIND acknowledges that the ability to move freely is linked to democracy and belonging. Navigating through MIND can be challenging, with individuals often feeling disoriented upon exiting the metro. Smooth navigation fosters familiarity, stronger memories, and a greater likelihood of return visits. To enhance accessibility and improve the overall experience, MIND is exploring the introduction of inclusive vehicles in the area. Within Desire, MIND aims to employ a universal design approach, creating an experience accessible and usable by all people without the need for specialised adaptations. This approach enforces a single design solution to accommodate the widest range of users.

### Tools employed

After choosing the principles and approach, MIND aimed to understand how stakeholders perceive its current status. To achieve this, MIND used three main tools: conducting interviews with key stakeholders to explore perceptions and outline future steps, engaging in surveys and meetings to identify opportunities and gather perspectives, and facilitating focus



groups with experts to examine the principles from practical and theoretical angles. Feedback highlighted several key concerns. First, stakeholders noted the absence of a cohesive community within MIND, describing it as a "non-place" lacking social connections and engagement opportunities. There was also a lack of aesthetic appeal. Second, stakeholders pointed out the absence of shade, resting places, and gathering areas along the 'Decumano', the site's main street and link to the metro station. Third, there were issues with wayfinding, causing people to frequently get lost and have difficulty moving across the site. These issues particularly affected patients of the Galeazzi hospital.

MIND's experiences provided valuable insights from various stakeholders. Dialogues included exploring the concept of agoras, which connect aesthetics with community building. A focus group with students from Scuola Del Botticino, located within MIND, revealed desires for improved aesthetics, greater inclusivity, social interaction opportunities, a welcoming atmosphere, vibrant colors, natural landscapes integrated with architecture, and designated gathering spaces. Additionally, as part of the focus group, students were asked to compose postcards to friends, depicting their first impressions of MIND through pictures and text. Subsequently, they were invited to envision MIND in the year 2050 and craft another postcard from this future perspective, prompting them to reflect on MIND's potential future evolution. These insights serve as important considerations for shaping the future of MIND and MIND intends to share them as guidance with space developers.

Based on these insights, within Desire, MIND decided to focus on the Decumano. The idea of 'MINDforAll' originated in early 2023 from strategic discussions between representatives from PlusValue, Lendlease, and Politecnico di Milano. This early-stage concept envisions transforming public spaces within MIND, emphasising accessibility, hospitality, and inclusion. These principles are integrated into the strategic development dimensions and evaluation systems to monitor the site's evolution and long-term impact. As part of the process, an interpretative model was developed (Beauty for All), outlining the principles of beauty and inclusivity in public spaces, accompanied by a system of indicators. The model includes eleven output indicators that describe the public space experience, particularly within the Decumanum, and are easily understandable by non-experts. These indicators were validated through a focus group that included start-ups, technology experts, an artist, and representatives from physically impaired communities and neighbouring areas. Additionally, eleven interviews were conducted with experts in urban transformation, impact measurement, and key stakeholders involved in the MIND decision-making process.

Towards the end of the Desire project, an artistic experiment was conducted by placing four benches at strategic locations along the Decumano, linking to one of the 'Beauty for All' framework indicators. An artefact, realised as a mobile polygonal yellow bench made from recycled yellow wood (Figure 14) was created to serve as a marker of local identity. The benches aimed to provide aesthetic resting spots for older individuals, children, and those with health conditions, encouraging longer stays and transforming the area into a hub for socialising and knowledge-sharing.





*Figure 14. Benches at Mind Innovation District. Photo credits Hanne Kokkegaard.*

## Learnings and reflections

Reflections on the benches highlighted several key points. First, the MIND project team evaluated the materials used. To adhere to the Desire principle of *circularity*, they reused formwork timber, which, despite being resistant, was unsuitable for painting and had to be used in its raw form. The design, however, was well-defined and enhanced the area's aesthetic appeal. Additionally, signs were placed to guide visitors to the benches and the central meeting point of MIND. The benches aimed to provide resting spots for vulnerable people, encouraging longer stays, social interaction, and improving the space's livability and sociability. The team recognized that the impact of the benches as an artistic installation could be enhanced. They envisioned a more impactful artistic presence to beautify the area and engage the community on a deeper level.

MIND has reflected on how it can empower actors and communities. Each actor within MIND operates with their own agenda, shaped by shared values and stakeholder expectations. MIND aims to influence these agendas and engage actors by offering a perspective aligned with the principles of NEB (New Ecology of Business). MIND also explored leveraging existing capacities when they align with corporate objectives. When

there's a gap, MIND seeks individuals who resonate with community issues and can bridge the divide between corporate goals and community needs. Furthermore, MIND aims to recognize and value local leaders, involving them actively in projects and listening to them. MIND supports these leaders by collecting and translating their knowledge into actionable insights and strategies.

### Future plans

The MIND project team is currently monitoring the bench installation, although rainy weather in April and May has delayed the assessment of its impact. The aim is to measure the concentration of people in the areas with benches and the time frames during the day and week when they are most used. This data will help determine if the benches' positioning meets users' needs. The collected information will be valuable for project partners and the developer, who can use it to develop targeted initiatives or re-evaluate logistical decisions. These insights will also be presented to district stakeholders and discussed in a workshop to ensure effective knowledge sharing and application. If data collection is successful, the installations will remain in the district for continued use.

## 3. Lessons learned from across the sites' experiences and recommendations for future governance

This chapter provides an analysis of the lessons learned from the processes and methods employed across the eight sites participating in the Desire project. By synthesising these insights, the chapter proposes valuable takeaways that characterise the demonstration phase. These takeaways are particularly relevant for implementing effective local engagement approaches in future governance. More specifically, the findings aim to inform and guide policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in their efforts to enhance community involvement and improve governance strategies.

### 3.1 Using creative, artistic, and designerly methods for deep and participatory engagement with places

One of Desire's goals is to experiment with creating sustainable, attractive, and inclusive urban spaces through interactions with, among others, citizens, designers, and artists. Thus, artistic and designerly practices have played a crucial role within the Desire project, in particular as participatory means to help communities engage deeply with a place and contribute to its transformation.

One notable example is the Garden Caretaker Project in Herlev, Denmark, which exemplified the integration of various artistic methods. Artists were invited to temporarily inhabit the site, utilising various methods such as fictional writing, sculpting, performance, and audio walks to explore diverse notions of place and foster deeper connections between stakeholders and the natural environment. This local project aimed to increase inhabitants' sensitivity and care for the more-than-human beings inhabiting the place (e.g., plants, animals, microbes, fungi).



The participatory nature of these interventions ensured that the community was actively involved in the creative process, demonstrating that art can act as a catalyst for community interaction and connection to place on sensory and emotional levels.

Along similar lines, Cascina Falchera in Turin explored the potential of integrating art to drive sustainable urban transformation. In an effort to merge artistic initiatives with ecological awareness, Cascina Falchera launched a residency program for visual artists with focus on water within the broader context of biodiversity, targeting young talents aged 25 to 35. A core objective of the residency is to increase youth participation through artistic expression. More specifically, the programme seeks to inspire the younger generation to contribute to Cascina Falchera's transformation processes creatively. This engagement is considered valuable in fostering a sense of ownership and belonging among young community members, ensuring that they feel invested in the futures of their urban environment.

In both Kalundborg, Denmark, and MIND in Milan, Italy, artistic installations have been employed to transform urban spaces into more engaging, aesthetic, and functional environments. In Kalundborg, the citizen-led Phoenix Group collaborated with local stakeholders to develop installations, repurposing old trash containers into movable seats and tree pots. These installations aimed to create green, cosy gathering spaces for citizens, fostering a sense of community and aesthetic appeal. Similarly, MIND introduced yellow benches as part of their urban greening initiatives. These benches not only provided seating but were also meant to serve as vibrant, eye-catching elements that encouraged people to pause, interact, and enjoy the urban space. Both projects build on the potential of artistic installations to enhance urban environments, making them more attractive and user-friendly while promoting social interaction and community engagement.

In Gadehavegaard, Denmark, the Desire project has utilised various designerly methods, such as envisioning, idea generation, and prototyping activities to engage youth in the urban transformation process. These activities aimed to empower young people by providing them a platform to voice their ideas and perspectives in designing their future urban environment, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and active participation. In turn, this meant the possibility of harnessing their creativity and unique perspectives, which are often overlooked in traditional urban transformation processes.

By weaving the community into the very fabric of creative, artistic and designerly practices, they go beyond mere aesthetics, promoting inclusivity and forging a collective activity. From the sites' experiences it became clear that such practices do not just serve to beautify spaces but have the potential to transform them, enriching them both visually and socially.

### 3.2 The importance of building a sense of belonging, trust, relationships

A recurrent theme across the Desire project sites is the crucial role of building trust, relationships, and a sense of belonging. These elements are essential not only for creating livable spaces and fostering engagement but also for ensuring the long-term sustainability of urban transformation efforts.



This was particularly evident in Wildemanbuurt, Amsterdam, a neighbourhood characterised by distrust between residents and formal institutions. Here, building trusting relationships was a core focus. The establishment of resident-led working groups, played a crucial role. These groups addressed specific community needs and interests, providing a platform for active engagement, dialogue, collaboration, and mutual support. They facilitated regular interactions and fostered a sense of belonging, ownership and responsibility towards the neighbourhood's development among residents. Wildemanbuurt also highlighted the importance of providing neutral spaces for open dialogue, active listening, and informal connections. In workshop settings, trust was enhanced through intentional design, such as sitting in a circle to facilitate equal participation, scheduling silent time for reflection, and creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding.

In Kalundborg, Denmark, fostering a sense of belonging between students and young citizens and the Circular Campus was a central focus. Students from various educational backgrounds were engaged in workshops and activities aimed at gathering their impressions and ideas about how Kalundborg could become a more attractive place that the students would actually like to spend their time in. Another notable initiative in Kalundborg is the citizen-led Phoenix Group, which, similar to ODGs in Wildemanbuurt, provided the citizens with a hands-on, tangible, and action-oriented connection to their environment, fostering a sense of belonging, ownership and responsibility towards their place.

In Herlev, Denmark, a sense of belonging and relationships was also essential. In doing so, the Garden Caretaker Project emphasised the importance of extended periods of being physically present. Artists were on-site, residing in a 'droplet', serving as the temporary habitat of the artists and anchoring the activities to a specific place and time while also being a learning space where participants encounter artistic processes. The droplet introduces an unusual shape to the built environment – round, small, and see-through – thereby attracting attention and curiosity of the residents, allowing for ongoing dialogue and relationship-building. The artistic methods employed in Herlev created shared experiences that strengthened the residents' connection to their environment and each other.

Also in Riga, Latvia, the renovation of the Ziepju housing block emphasised the importance of building a sense of belonging and trust through active citizen participation. By involving residents in workshops and meetings, the project aimed to foster a collaborative atmosphere. Trust was cultivated through regular updates and transparent communication about the project's progress, ensuring residents felt included and informed. The participatory approach not only strived to enhance their sense of ownership but also shift the community's mentality from relying on centralised systems to actively engaging in shaping their own living environment, thereby strengthening their connection to the place and each other.

Whether through resident-led working groups, neutral spaces for dialogue, intentional workshop designs, the physical presence of community-engaging projects, or genuine, consistent engagement and transparent communication, these experiences across various Desire territorial sites highlight the critical importance of building trusting relationships and a sense of belonging.





### 3.3 Finding the right formats for multi-stakeholder participation

The Desire project relied on multi-stakeholder participation, involving citizens including youth, businesses, local and even multispecies stakeholders. Such stakeholders were engaged by employing a diverse range of formats across various sites, including participatory workshops, residency programmes, working groups, and hackathons.

Participatory workshops were a key format employed throughout the Desire project. In Kalundborg, for example, workshops and activities with students from different educational institutions gathered innovative ideas for city improvements. Similarly, in Riga, the renovation process of the Ziepju housing block utilised participatory workshops to actively involve residents in the design process. In Gadehavegaard, theme weeks were organised for students to engage them in the redevelopment of their neighbourhood, encouraging them to envision and design a future park area. Also Cascina Falchera used participatory workshops to reconnect youth with natural spaces through artistic and ecological activities and to elevate youth participation and strengthen community bonds.

Another format employed were artist residency programmes, as exemplified by the Garden Caretaker programme in Herlev and the planned residency programme in Cascina Falchera, Turin. This format essentially involves artists taking up residencies within the community and organising various artistic practices such as fictional writing sessions, sculpting, landscape or sound walks, performances, and other creative participatory activities tailored to the site's specific context. In Desire, these residencies were recognised and employed in particular for their potential to foster a deeper connection between local stakeholders and the site's natural environment, specifically by encouraging interactions between human and non-human stakeholders such as animals, plants, fungi, and other non-human species.

Resident-led working groups were another effective format, particularly in Wildemanbuurt and Kalundborg. Wildemanbuurt's ('Design & Do') groups 'Green & Happy' and 'Healthy Connections' and Kalundborg's 'Phoenix Group' provided platforms for residents to enact their interest in catalysing change in their respective local context and collaborate on specific issues and initiatives, enhancing the sense of ownership and responsibility among residents. Thematic working groups allow residents to contribute to urban transformation, ensuring that the changes happening are relevant and desirable to local needs. Moreover, such working groups hold a potential to help residents develop social capital such as stronger relationships and valuable skills such as collaboration, leadership, project management, and negotiation. In addition, when residents see their input being valued and acted upon, there is a potential for an increased sense of trust in local governance and institutions.

Another participatory format used as part of Desire was the hackathon in BTC City. At its core, a hackathon is an often multi-day, intensive event where individuals from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise collaborate to develop solutions to tackle pressing problems. In BTC City, the event was designed to bring young people together to collaborate, innovate and develop creative ideas to tackle BTC's sustainability challenges. As seen in BTC City, hackathons can create a dynamic, enthusiastic, and engaging collaborative environment that encourages creative problem solving, innovation and youth participation. The combination of time constraints, a competitive spirit that is balanced with team



collaboration can spur the development of innovative ideas that may not emerge from a traditional working environment.

Generally, within Desire, engaging a broad range of stakeholders was considered crucial for ensuring that diverse perspectives and needs are considered and stakeholders involved in the design and decision-making processes develop a stronger sense of ownership, responsibility, and commitment towards their community and environment. Furthermore, this approach was used to support the development of creative, innovative, and context-sensitive ideas that might not emerge from traditional (top-down) approaches.

One stakeholder group that was particularly often involved across sites were young people. In Kalundborg, Denmark, the project engaged students from various educational institutions in workshops and activities aimed at gathering their impressions and ideas about the city. In Riga, Latvia, the renovation of the Ziepju housing block included children and young people in participatory design workshops. In Wildemanbuurt, Amsterdam, the project supported youth-led initiatives to empower young people and provide them with the tools and opportunities to make a positive impact in their community. At Cascina Falchera in Turin, Italy, the transformation of the old farmhouse involved numerous activities aimed at engaging young people to reconnect youth with natural spaces through participatory approaches. In Gadehavegaard, Denmark, the project focused on engaging youth through theme weeks where pupils envisioned and designed ideas for the future park area. BTC City in Ljubljana utilised a hackathon as an approach to involve youth, providing an opportunity for them to collaborate, share ideas and thereby contribute to developing creative solutions for the urban development within BTC city. Engaging youth in urban transformation projects serve multiple purposes; it can bring fresh perspectives, energy and creativity into projects, which are crucial for fostering innovative solutions, ensure that their perspectives and needs are heard and addressed, but it can also instil a sense of ownership and responsibility for their future urban environments within them. Put differently, engaging youth can support urban development to be inclusive, forward-thinking, and sustainable, while also encouraging the next generation to take an active role in shaping the future of their communities. The Desire project sites demonstrated various ways through which this involvement can be promoted.

However, engaging a diverse range of stakeholders can be challenging. Initial distrust between citizens and formal institutions, communication and logistical issues, and fostering engagement and ensuring sustained participation can be significant hurdles. From the site experiences we learned that continuous, transparent, and genuine engagement and communication helps build trust into the initiatives and strong relationships among community members and stakeholders, which are essential for sustained engagement. Furthermore, Desire has shown that participatory processes that are tailored to the unique local context can not only lead to more effective and relevant outcomes, but also strengthen the support and trust of local actors in the organised initiatives.

## 4. Reflections and takeaways from expert organisations

As noted in the beginning of Section 2 ‘overview of sites’ a number of organisations have been involved in the placed-based activities at many of the sites. The partner PoliMi has



worked closely with the territorial sites MIND and Cascina Falchera in an action research process. For more insight on the initiatives, see section 2.8 and section 2.2. Other organisations, such as Really Regenerative Centre, Danske Ark and GXN, have contributed with their professional expertise through their role as ‘expert organisation’ and their active involvement in place-based activities. Reflections from Danske Ark on involving their members can be found in Deliverable 3.3 - *Narratives of Irresistible Circular Futures*.

The following section includes lessons learned from a practitioners perspective specifically from RRC’s and their involvement in Kalundborg and Herlev and GXN on their involvement in Gadehavegaard and BTC City. Moreover, it includes their considerations on implications for future projects working with or within urban transformations.

## 4.1 GXN

GXN’s principal contribution to the consortium was to infuse the research with expertise in design and circularity. By employing research-driven design methods, GXN sought to address the distinctive challenges posed by the territorial sites, particularly in Gadehavegaard, Denmark and in BTC City, Ljubljana.

In the case of Gadehavegaard, the objective was to meaningfully engage 8th graders in the transformation of their neighbourhood, providing them with the design tools that architects utilise on a daily basis. In the case of the BTC City site, the challenge was to question conventional approaches to urban greening, which often reduce the concept to mere quantitative metrics such as the number of trees, by facilitating the development of a more holistic and ambitious green vision through workshops and the hackathon.

In both cases, GXN supported and explored new participatory processes and helped to develop visions for upcoming urban transformations. Three key insights from GXN's involvement in these experiences are:

1. Design tools are an effective means to democratise the discussion on our built environment. They allow non-experts to articulate ideas in a variety of formats, including visual, descriptive, practical, and abstract, as well as referential. They are easily accessible and understandable, and they help to deeply understand user needs and desires.
2. The younger generation constitutes a valuable resource for the comprehension of a site. They frequently proffer uncommon perspectives and insights, and they can generate innovative concepts without the burden of real-world limitations.
3. Recording, analysing and reinterpreting the outputs of participatory processes into actionable principles is as important as the activity and it is a fundamental step to successfully inform later decisions.

While Desire provided an opportunity to experiment with processes outside the conventional business-as-usual approach, it also highlighted the challenges of scaling up these initiatives or making them relevant at the policy level. From GXN's perspective, integrating participatory processes can be an effective and inclusive tool that combines design and educational purposes, but it also raises the question of how these processes can be implemented in a meaningful and financially sustainable way in the context of everyday-life industry. It is



therefore crucial to ensure that decision-makers are involved early on, so that they can act as an active part of the process and integrate learnings in later stages.

## 4.2 Really Regenerative Centre

Regenerative design and development work with living systems principles, emergence, understanding of place and designing relevant to what the processes of place, culture and economy reveal. Through our engagement in Kalundborg we were able to allow the emergence of key principles from the community (The Phoenix Group) rather than them being imposed, which we believe better reflects the bio-cultural uniqueness of the place and has a greater longevity and ownership by the community. These included valuing *movement*, *belonging* and *aesthetics* and setting up a baseline for further experimentation in the programme's second half. Developing a sense of belonging is often engendered by time and effort to engage meaningfully with others. A core way of working in regenerative development is based on nature's long-standing principle: relationship before task. It is important to allocate time and resources to building relationships between working groups, teams, and stakeholders before, during and after projects conclude. In the Kalundborg project, we allocated an additional 20% of the time to support the team, specifically in terms of skills for field building. The emergence of the Phoenix Group was probably the most successful contribution RRC made to that project.

**As an organisation, we learned that to** achieve genuine place-sourced insight that recognises the bio-cultural uniqueness of place, there was a need to support sites on designing participatory processes. In the case of Kalundborg, RRC took on that peer-to-peer learning role and elevated it to a developmental and participatory process where possible. Participating in Desire underscored what we already knew - that living systems principles – when adopted and experimented – have the potential to create transformative change away from our extractive economy towards a more just, fair, equitable and regenerative economy. It also underlines the importance of:

- Specifically; embedding social infrastructure such as a regenerative resourcing team, that allows multi-stakeholder teams to build relational capacity on an on-going basis, is essential to successful change.
- Specifically; the value of embedding embodied experiences (e.g. audiowalks) such as used in Herlev, which are less recognized ways of learning and knowing, but are incredibly powerful and should not be underestimated in their power and effectiveness when working alongside intentional developmental thinking.
- Specifically, language and shared understanding continue to be challenges in multi-stakeholder groups. It is important to pay attention to diversity in worldview, cultural heritage, lived experience, and character/personality differences.

**Takeaways to consider for future projects working with or within urban transformations include:**

1. **A Story of Place or Integrated Design Process:** This allows project design to have an intentional evolutionary effect on the place in which the built environment project sits and the system it sits within. It is critical to designing interventions that leverage the biocultural uniqueness of place in an integrated perspective of ecology, economy,



and culture in any unique site. We recommend its integration into NEB and all built environment projects in the future.

2. **Shared Understanding & Relationship Before Task:** Making the potential of circular societies as *irresistible* to all life visible entails growing a shared understanding of what irresistibility means and could mean, in differing contexts, places and systems. Before developing outcomes, it is important to nurture shared understanding and relationships before task. Time invested in creating shared understanding and building foundational structures to create connection, and building critical multi-stakeholder and cross-programme relationships, confusion, misunderstanding and dissent – which have to be dealt with - can emerge.
3. **Biocultural Uniqueness:** All places at all fractals of place (bioregions, cities, towns, neighbourhoods, watersheds etc) have their own uniqueness. It is vital that placemakers respect cultural and biological patterns and indicators, uniqueness of place, when designing in the built environment. Incorporating approaches to study the unique conditions of sites and places through the lens of nested and related potential of economy, culture and ecology through the work on a site, is essential to create the conditions conducive to life.
4. **Identifying & Utilising Skills; Capability Building & Reflective Learning:** We are in a polycrisis, which many agree demands an evolution of thinking on economics, ecology and culture to meet its challenges. It is important to understand how transformative change happens. This includes shifting mindset out of the current paradigm in order to design differently. All NEB projects have the potential to build the regenerative design and development capability of the participating group if intentional learning is embedded in the project design. For example, it is important to introduce skills and expertise that may be existing in a project at the inception of projects, have a specific budget set aside and bring in additional expertise on an ad hoc basis, if needed.

## 5. Implications for the Desire principles

The Desire project partners co-created a Design Manifesto to steer the project activities. This manifesto was developed through a collaborative process that aimed at including and capturing all the represented perspectives. This manifesto includes five design principles<sup>12</sup> (engagement tools), which are *belonging*, *movement*, *biodiversity*, *circularity*, and *aesthetics*. Through Desire, the sites adopted one or several of such principles and tested them by envisioning, designing, facilitating, organising, and conducting place-based activities that matched those principles.

In December 2023, Aalborg University (AAU), leading WP3 *On-site Demonstrations*, talked to the organisations representing Desire's eight territorial sites to discuss their experiences from designing locally grounded place-based activities and working with the Desire principles. The following summarises patterns from learning-by-doing across Desire's eight sites that emerged through conversations with the site representatives from Gadehavegaard in

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<sup>12</sup>

[https://www.irresistiblecircularity.eu/assets/uploads/About/Manifest-and-principles/Desire\\_Manifest\\_Principles.pdf](https://www.irresistiblecircularity.eu/assets/uploads/About/Manifest-and-principles/Desire_Manifest_Principles.pdf)



Høje Taastrup, Kalundborg Campus and Herlev Asphalt Factory in Denmark, Cascina Falchera in Turin, MIND in Milan in Italy, BTC City in Ljubljana, Slovenia, Ziepju in Riga, Latvia and the Wildemanbuurt neighbourhood in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The sessions followed the same structure. As preparation for the interviews AAU read the updated activity plans completed by the sites for the second experimentation phase (see Deliverable 3.1 *Customization of the Desire principles and demonstration plans*). Moreover, they were asked to share a photo of something that made them proud during the process of Desire and/or an image that captured the essence of their site and its transformation. This served as a visual prompt and entry point for tuning into the uniqueness of each site and sharing a status that took a positive outlook on their achievements and bridge across contexts. For example, the site of Herlev shared two images of their site (figure 15) to show the transformation surrounding the droplet – from newly built, to a space integrated with flora and fauna.



*Figure 15. The transformation surrounding the droplet – from newly built, to a space surrounded by flora and fauna. Photo credits Hanne Kokkegård (left) and NXT (right).*

The second part of the interview was formed as a semi-structured conversation on the site's selection of principles using visual prompts prepared by AAU to guide the conversation (see example below):

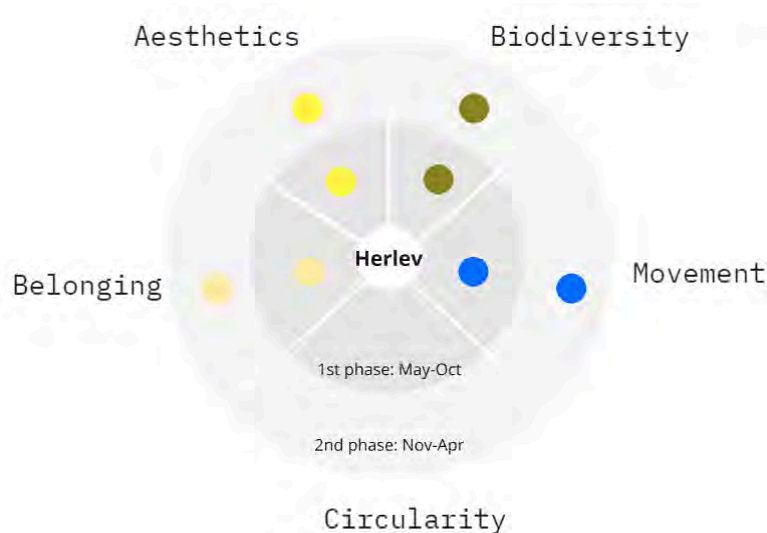


Figure 16. Visual prompt to guide the conversation around principles. Figure credits WP3.

### 5.1 Principles affirm existing approaches and values

Some sites reported that their existing approaches and core values are directly reflected in the Desire principles. For instance, the team in Wildemanbuurt emphasised that working with *movement* and nurturing agencies is central to their work. However, when designing and conducting locally grounded activities, these principles are not explicitly communicated to participants. Instead, they subtly underpin the approaches employed.

A shared observation is that the meaning of the principles is unfolded through local practice. For the team in Wildemanbuurt this has meant an emphasis on ‘trust’ as a notion that is up for continuous discussion, negotiation, and enabler for their design practice with the neighbourhood. Moreover, the process of Desire brought about reflections on their modes of practice and in articulating their approach. Thus, when using models and principles, these are not used to set the agenda for what they aim to do, but rather as guidelines for framing activities and explaining them to others. This place-sensitiveness, i.e. acknowledging places and communities as complex entities entwined in networks and characterised by diversity and various life forms, is crucial when working with the principles to ensure their relevance and modify their definitions accordingly.

A reciprocal relationship between the Desire principles and local practice, characterised by mutual support, investment, and care, can be observed in Herlev. The Herlev team saw a clear connection between the principles of *belonging, aesthetics, and biodiversity*/Multispecies and their work on using artistic practices to reveal the essence of a place and stimulate a sense of belonging. Through synthesising their insights and experiences, the meaning of these principles has been extended and nuanced. For example, their work with *aesthetics* demonstrates how it can activate emotions and sensory experiences related to a place. Relational aesthetics describes this approach, where artists use tools from theatre, writing, and narrative to express the voices of people and more-than-human species involved, activating characters in a place (e.g., distinct species, trees, brick, leaves, asphalt). The relational aesthetics approach is also evident in their collaborations with local institutions,

inspired by the team in Amsterdam. Here, listening to local institutions' needs is essential as a starting point for collaboration, rather than proposing ready-made solutions.

## 5.2 Principles challenge the status quo and act as guardrails for experimentation

Conversations with various site representatives revealed that while some principles are challenging to act on and implement, they serve as essential internal reminders to provoke and reimagine the status quo. This has been particularly noted for the principle of *biodiversity* at the social-inclusive housing sites in Riga and Gadehavegaard. Implementing the *biodiversity* principle has been instrumental in rethinking the starting point for design processes. For the Ziepjū Street site, concerns about biodiversity can be overshadowed by more urgent priorities when restoring and regenerating social housing buildings and courtyards. In Gadehavegaard, the housing company Domea.dk, partner in Desire and leading the transformation of the social housing area, is new to incorporating biodiversity alongside circularity. They selected these principles knowing they would be challenging to implement and engage the community. This was evident when two 8th-grade classes were asked to design a future green park area. Students were given themes to work with (circularity, safety, biodiversity), and none chose biodiversity. This reluctance could be due to the abstract nature of biodiversity in such settings, highlighting the difficulty in making it relevant. Nonetheless, working with the *biodiversity* principle can challenge internal processes and approaches for community engagement by employing less apparent methods such as participatory design, props, prompts, and techniques.

## 5.3 An integrated view of the principles honours reality's entanglements

Key to designing and organising activities within the Desire framework is acknowledging the complexity and interconnectedness of real life. The interplay between the principles, the manifesto, and the activities designed by the sites, considering their prior knowledge of local contexts, reveals the importance of viewing the principles as overlapping concepts and frames. Sites reported that while specific principles were selected to guide their experimentation, an integrated approach worked best in practice to address the unpredictability and messiness of real life. Put differently, the sites found that while specific principles provided a useful framework, their practical application often required flexibility and adaptability, embracing the interconnected and dynamic nature of real-world contexts. For example, in Turin, the core of the program centred around the element of water at the repurposed Cascina Falchera, aiming to reconcile the city with nature. This integrated approach combined the principles with a locally grounded, regenerative strategy even before selecting specific principles for experimentation. Similarly, in Wildemanbuurt, experimentation began before the formal co-creation of principles. Reflecting on their practice, the site shared insights into fostering a sense of belonging and movement through trust-building activities among local partners, citizens, and institutions. In Kalundborg, a regenerative angle was applied to identify synergies between a long-term campus project, industry, municipality, and citizens. A self-organised citizen group, highly active and eager to spark positive change with the arrival of the new architecture school, played a significant role. Listening to their needs and perspectives guided the activities and experimentation in the first phase. In the second phase, this citizen group, along with students and industry representatives, continued to collaborate.





## 6. Conclusion

This deliverable, D3.2 *Desire site experience and future plans*, has provided an overview of the activities and reflections from eight European demonstration sites involved in the Desire project. Looking ahead, there is great potential to build on Desire learnings in future projects. Not only have the site-specific experiments enriched local communities, but the unique insights and learnings from each site have also provided valuable lessons for future urban transformations within the Desire project and beyond (see section 2). In particular, they point to the importance of 1) creative, artistic and designerly methods for deep and participatory engagement with a place, 2) building a sense of belonging, trust and relationships, and 3) multi-stakeholder participation to foster deep connections between people and their environment (see section 3). However, some challenges and limitations have also emerged during the project. The short duration of engagement activities, initial difficulties in engaging participants, and the complexities of aligning diverse stakeholder interests were some of those. These experiences highlight the need for extended time frames, robust stakeholder engagement strategies, and flexible, context-specific methodologies that can adapt to the needs of urban redevelopment projects. The project has developed, explored, and applied the principles of *belonging*, *movement*, *biodiversity*, *circularity*, and *aesthetics* to steer the project activities (section 5). These principles, as well as the applied practices, insights and reflections (see section 4) that have emerged from Desire, could serve as an inspiration and basis for other European cities facing similar urban challenges.

