



**HAL**  
open science

## What Place for Ambiance in the Urban Renaturing Process? Session 16 – Introduction

Emeline Bailly, Sylvie Laroche

► **To cite this version:**

Emeline Bailly, Sylvie Laroche. What Place for Ambiance in the Urban Renaturing Process? Session 16 – Introduction. Proceedings of the 4th International Congress on Ambiances, Alloaesthesia: Senses, Inventions, Worlds, Réseau International Ambiances, Dec 2020, e-conference, France. pp. 310-314, 10.48537/hal-03220267 . hal-03220267

**HAL Id: hal-03220267**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03220267v1>**

Submitted on 25 May 2021

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

# What Place for Ambiance in the Urban Renaturing Process?

## Session 16 – Introduction

Emeline BAILLY<sup>1</sup>,  
Sylvie LAROCHE<sup>2</sup>

The city and biodiversity are struggling to make an alliance. The city offers only a small diversity of environments and biodiversity by artificialising the soil, by controlling urban nature in dedicated spaces (parks, ornamental gardens, the surroundings of buildings and roadsides), by reducing it to recreational or decorative functions (landscaping, planting and flowering, etc.).<sup>12</sup>

With the environmental and climatic issues, the services provided by nature are being rediscovered (CO<sub>2</sub> absorption, island of freshness, rainwater recovery...). Newly developed neighbourhoods, particularly eco-neighbourhoods, are deploying nature for its ecosystem services. They are adorned with gullies, permeable soils, green roofs and facades, etc. However, this view of nature reduces it to a function. Biodiversity in the city calls, in our view, for a broader alliance between the city and nature to improve ecological quality and urban life. Our hypothesis is that natural environments are part of the basis of human pleasure in places, i.e. their sensitive relationship with the environments inhabited by humans and the fauna and flora.

In cities, nature is increasingly perceived, appropriated and desired as a medium for strolls, recreational practices and the sensorial, emotional enjoyment that comes with imagining being in such locations. It encourages the creation of milieus and habitats for non-humans. It thus can contribute to improve the urban, ecological and sensory qualities of urban spaces for humans and non-humans.

We inhabit the city with our senses, and they charge the places with the multiple meanings and affects that we confer on it. This is what we call the sensitive city (Bailly, 2018). This sensitive city is, in our opinion, a key to the ecological city and, more broadly, “biodiverse,” to use Philippe Clergeau’s expression. (2015). Thinking about the sensitive city therefore implies placing the individual at the heart of the urban fabric and questioning the basis of his or her positive or negative perception of inhabited, natural and built places.

This session aims to question the ways in which the concept of architectural and urban ambiances allows us to develop sustainable life conditions for living beings and to encourage different forms of coexistence between humans and non-humans. It also aims to question the ways in which it encourages urban quality by creating environments that foster the pleasure of being in a place.

---

1. C.S.T.B.

2. C.S.T.B.

## Nature, the Key to Urban Feelings?

Nature offers a filiation with the sensitive world, through the sensations and feelings it promotes, the imaginations it arouses. It appeals to our five senses (the smells of the earth, the sounds of rustling water or leaves in trees, the touch of foamy, earthy materials on the ground, views of the sky, the taste of sandy, marine or other dust...). It inspires both positive and negative affects such as water which can inspire calm, appeasement but also the fear of drowning. Gaston Bachelard (1942) speaks of material imagination, that is, this perception in the articulation of reality, symbolic representations and images. Natural elements (water, earth, air, etc.) evoke, for example, various groups of images, which are themselves sources of sensations and affects. For example, the image of the earth can evoke the roots (and its anchoring in this place), the nourishing earth, death and the cycle of life (birth of seeds, decomposition of dead leaves...).

Nature also reveals an emotion of the world that is beyond us. It is nature as a force that engenders, that creates the living, as the Latin origin of the term *natura* (Littre Dictionary) reminds us. It introduces the link to the living, to the cosmos, to our earthly home as Thierry Paquot would say (2005). It is imbued with cosmogony (relationship to the earth, to the living, to the universe...) and poetics (dreaming of one's presence on earth, one's collective life to better project oneself towards death). Natural environments, like built environments, thus inspire meanings and, more broadly, sensations, affects and imaginations. They then raise the question of the links between nature and the spaces developed to reconnect with the sensitive dimension of cities.

Rather, the construction of urban spaces was built by opposing the city, a place of civilization, and the countryside, a place of nourishing nature or immersion in the landscape. With urban sprawl and the height of the urban perimeter, this distinction has lost its meaning. The challenge of a new alliance between the city and nature arises to promote biodiversity, ecological environments and reconnect with human sensibilities.

In fact, with this split city / countryside, civilization / wilderness, the experience of nature in the cities has faded away, reserved for excursions outside the city, or for indirect sensations (Bailly et al., 2019). While cities, especially since industrialization, tend to deny the relationship to the existing site and natural environment, nature recalls this indirectly through the play of topography, the presence of water, the play of light and shadow, the variations in climate... It thus experiences nature indirectly even if the experience of nature has become distorted (Fleury and Prévot, 2017). In fact, today, there is a growing demand for nature among city dwellers.

Restoring a relationship between humans and their living environment seems key to us. If urbanised space has taken the place of the city (and its capacity to make a city, a community) and if it has become the dominant living environment for people, city-dwellers aspire to the pleasure of being, strolling, experiencing, meeting and acting in the spaces where they live. We therefore believe it is necessary to give back a sense and possibilities of nature experiences to metropolitan territories and the multiple places that make them up by playing on the urban and natural alliance. Ecological urban planning can then be a lever for biodiversity, for urban adaptation to climate change, and even more so for the desire of city dwellers to feel, feel, imagine and experience their place of life.

## Urban Nature Ambiances: Nature Experiences and Possible Co-Existence Between Humans and Non-Humans

Among these links between nature, planning and urban sensitivities, The stakes involved in climate change call for the development of new renaturing policies to adapt urban spaces to hazards. Indeed, nature (or a natural solution) and the redevelopment of ecosystems offer perspectives regarding a more lasting territorial resilience than many grey infrastructures. Renaturing metropolises, i.e. humans' main environment, can also foster the urban quality of developed spaces. In this context, focus will be specifically placed on renaturing projects that aim to reconcile urban and natural potentials in metropolitan areas.

We can observe two types of renaturation projects. According to Pierre Pech (2015), this could be “*In the first instance, renaturalisation is an ecological process following on from a phase of anthropisation or artificialisation, as for instance in the case of abandoned brownfield sites. In the second, there is a development project, particularly in urban settings, aiming to provide for a participation of natural elements in the overall effect, or indeed for a contribution to the functioning of the urbanised system*”. These projects can be developed on a micro scale, such as the actions carried out by the Depave association in Oregon, which aim to remove asphalt surfaces in schoolyards, alleyways or car parks in order to reduce the pollution of run-off water and increase the amount of land available for the restoration of habitats for fauna and flora. Renaturation projects are also carried out on the scale of large territories, with projects to clean up abandoned land and its possible conversion into landscaped parks, such as the Kodak wasteland (13 hectares), located on the banks of the Ourcq canal in Greater Paris. Finally, they can also be applied on a metropolitan scale with projects to enhance the value of urban nature, such as the green corridor of the capital Beijing, or Copenhagen, which since its Finger Plan has continued to link the city to nature until today with its climate plan and its major natural renewal project, which wants all the inhabitants of the Danish capital to be able to walk to a large green space (parks, nature reserves, etc.) and aquatic space (inlets penetrating the city). If these various renaturation projects are often cited as references in terms of the creation and enhancement of natural spaces with high ecological value, the experience by humans and non-humans of this urban nature is little questioned. Thus, how does the development of ecological rehabilitation projects integrate and encourage the development of more qualitative sensitive experiences? How can the consideration of architectural and urban ambiances enable an influence on ecosystems?

Currently, the consideration of ambiances in renaturation projects is mainly aimed at limiting artificial light pollution (Longcore, Rich, 2014) and acoustic pollution (Watts, 1999). Different approaches, such as those carried out for the development of green, blue and black frames, aim to preserve biodiversity in land-use planning policies. More specifically, renaturation projects also seek to take into account climatic ecological effects in order to disperse air pollution and limit urban heat islands. (Melaas E. et alii, 2016). These approaches make it possible to assess the impact of environmental nuisances on ecosystems, but they do not take into account sensory phenomena and the dynamics of environmental production by living organisms (both humans and animals practise, speak, partially mask the environment and ultimately modify it). The approach proposed by architectural and urban ambiances invites us to consider the sensitive configurations perceptible and produced by the living as a set of sensations

participating in the specific creation of an atmosphere, or even its quality<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the spaces built or managed by renaturation projects can be the object of temporary investments through spontaneous commitments such as squatting or artistic installations (Bailly, 2016), becoming anxiety-provoking and repulsive universes, especially at night and in winter. However, it should also be noted that in these places, the energy and vitality of nature can also be considered essential and as a need for people, who attribute to them a well-being and a possible fullness. Breathing spaces are created in the city and near their homes or workplaces. A network of open spaces (Fleury, 2014) is formed, where the sensory synthesis of the different stimuli, the intensity and diversity of uses that can vary considerably in space and time reveals the attachment and anchoring of the inhabitants to this type of territory. These multiple experiences are thus revealing the specific atmosphere and landscape in the city, which brings a new way of looking at nature, especially for its sensitive essence.

### **Towards an Ecological and Sensitive Urban Design**

In our opinion, this ecological and sensitive urban design is key to approaching another, more ecosophical society (i.e. a “wisdom of inhabiting,” from the Greek *mokos*, (house, natural environment) and *Sophia*) that puts Human back in the ecosphere and no longer at its peak (Naess, 2017). Felix Guattari (1989) stressed the importance of linking three ecologies (environmental, social and mental) to reinvent individual and collective existential territories, linking humanity and the biosphere.

This ecosophy could also, in our opinion, be linked to a form of ecology of the sensible. It will make it possible to meet the unprecedented challenges of biodiversity and the adaptation of cities to climate change and to lay the foundations of a new model of society combining the city and the living, the individual with his sensibilities, and man with his living environment.

This alliance could take shape thanks to urban renaturation projects promoting natural spaces accessible to humans and non-humans, sources of sensitive experiences and singular atmospheres. Linking these different spaces together could create a network of living spaces for the living that irrigate the metropolis and penetrate the built environment and networks of places with multiple unique ambiances, enriching the urban environment. This posture is based on the notion of “reliance” defined by Edgar Morin and taken up again in the “urban metaphor” proposed by Chris Younes (Younes, 2015): “reliance is “the work of links,” “*the act of connecting and relating and its result.*” This approach calls for urban places to be managed in symbiosis with the living in order to “*resist the exhaustion of environments and people, through creative urban planning based on links rather than fracture, activating the capacity of an environment to open up possibilities between nature and culture, between local, translocal and global*” (Younes, p.58, 2015).

This urban, ecological and sensitive conception is presented in the two papers

---

3. *Within the framework of research on edges and urban landscapes (Bailly et al., 2020), a C.S.T.B. team (E. Bailly, S. Carré, J. Defrance, S. Laroche, C. Martinsons and M. Sabre) identified specific atmospheres between natural and developed environments in the metropolis of Greater Geneva. It was noted that climatic ambiances have a “mitigating role” in the extreme effects produced by climatic hazards by creating islands of coolness that irrigate the metropolitan fabric. Daytime lighting ambiances have a regulating effect on sunshine in the sense that places are sunny in winter and shaded in summer. Sound ambiances produce softer, calmer territories, with a sound identity mixing natural and urban sound. Finally, the perceived ambiances of urban edges can provide people with a resourceful ambiance and a metaphorical potential that allows them to project themselves into other real or sometimes even imaginary places.*

attached to the session, which highlight the multiple spatial singularities and variations in ambiances formed in renaturation projects. The first article, by Frederic Bell and Gwenaëlle de Kerret, focuses on urban linear parks projects in Paris, New York and Seoul. The analysis of mobility and seating spaces reveals the physical, sensitive and metaphorical links between these high-rise parks and the surrounding built environment. The second article, by Maroua En-Nejjari, focuses more specifically on spontaneous urban beach situations. This body scale approach allows us to question the qualities of this urban nature located at the interface between the water and the dense neighbourhoods of Nantes and Toulouse.

## References

- Bachelard G., 1942, *L'eau et les rêves, essai sur l'imagination de la matière*, Paris, Librairie José Corti
- Bailly E., Laroche S., Finger A., 2020, *Lisières et paysages urbains*, rapport de recherche Interreg, CSTB, Hepia, Asters (2017-2020), Genève.
- Bailly E., Marchand D., Maugard A., 2019, *Biodiversité urbaine, pour une ville vivante*, Paris, Ed PC.
- Bailly, E., 2016, Franges intra-urbaines à l'épreuve des projets de paysage, *Projets de Paysage*, n°13, Paysages des franges urbaines en projet, janvier, [en ligne]
- Clergeau P., 2015, *Manifeste pour une ville biodiversitaire*, Paris, éditions Apogée.
- Fleury C. Prévot A.C. (dir), 2017, *Le souci de la nature*, Apprendre, inventer, gouverner, Paris, CNRS Editions
- Fleury A., 2014, Les périurbains et leurs espaces publics : enquête sur les franges nord de la métropole parisienne, *Cybergeog : European Journal of Geography* [En ligne], Espace, Société, Territoire, n° 841.
- Guattari Felix, 1989, *Les trois écologies*, Paris, éditions Galilée.
- Longcore T., Rich C., (2004), Ecological light pollution, *Frontiers in Ecology and Environment*, pp 191- 198
- Melaas E. K., Wang A. J., Miller D. L. and Friedl M. A., (2016), Interactions between urban vegetation and surface urban heat islands: a case study in the Boston metropolitan region, *Environmental Research Letters*, 11, 5
- Naess A., 2017, *Une écologie pour la vie, Introduction à l'écologie profonde*, Paris Seuil.
- Paquot T., 2005, *Demeure terrestre, enquête vagabonde sur l'habiter*, Paris, European.
- Pech P., 2015, *Renaturation, Hypergeo*, [en ligne]
- Watts G, Chinn L, Godfrey N. (1999), The effects of vegetation on the perception of traffic noise. *Appl Acoust.* 56, pp 39-56
- Younes, C., 2015, *Métamorphes in Morphogène et dynamiques urbaines. Les ateliers de morphologie*, EHESS -EnsAD, coord. par Franceschelli, S., Gribaudi, M., Le Bras H., pp. 54-62