

Ground(s)

Mapping, Designing and Caring:
Towards a Convivial Society

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GROUNDs

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Annalisa Trentin8

Ground(s): An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Societal Transformation and Spatial Dynamics.

Irene Cazzaro, Carlo Costantino, Federico Diodato, Ludovica Rosato, Giulia Turci 12

Ground(s). Mapping, Designing and Caring: Towards a Convivial Society.

SECTION .01

FOUNDATIONS

Francesca Sabatini18

Caring for the Underground: the Human-centered Mapping of Homeless People by the Urban Commons of Bologna.

Marco Manfra, Davide Turrini 34

Collective Design and Production for Caring. Spaces on the Edge as Common Goods Between City and Territory.

Kevin Santus..... 56

Design for Urban Recovery and Long-term Resilience Through Groundworks. Approaching the Fragilities of Two Dutch Neglected Neighborhoods.

SECTION .02

MAPPING THE GROUNDS

Sara Favargiotti, Chiara Chioni, Margherita Pasquali..... 72

The Val di Sole Blueprint: Mapping Dynamics Assets for Sustainable Development of Marginal Territories in Alpine Context.

Maria Giada Di Baldassarre 92

Habitats Portraits. Trans-scalar Mapping as an Exploratory Tool to Unveil the Dynamics of Inner Areas in Marche .

SECTION .03

DESIGNING GROUNDS

Matteo Vianello 110
Sailing the Farm. Three Projects about Ground and its Politics onto Water Surfaces.

Margherita Ascari, Virginia Vignali124
Designing the Accessibility of Ground(s) through Data and Design-Driven Methods.

SECTION .04

CARING FOR THE GROUNDS

Alice Lewis..... 138
Four Revisions toward an Embodied Landscape Architecture Practice.

Fabrizio D'Angelo154
The Need to Design the Energy Ground.

Leonardo Ramondetti172
Caring for Infrastructural Grounds. A Research Agenda.



Ground(s). Mapping, Designing and Caring: Towards a Convivial Society.

Irene Cazzaro, Carlo Costantino, Federico Diodato, Ludovica Rosato, Giulia Turci

The ground represents the tangible substrata that forms the basis upon which life exists. It serves as a crucial source of essential nutrients and constitutes a non-renewable component of our natural capital, fulfilling fundamental human needs: a mere handful of soil contains at least 8 billion living organisms, such as bacteria and earthworms, a number that is analogous to the global human population. These organisms are in a constant state of flux, cohabiting and contributing to the co-evolution of our ecosystems.

Simultaneously, the ground embodies an intangible element, underpinning our sense of belonging and heritage: the substrate upon which human communities take root, flourish, and imprint their legacy. In the context of the urgent need for ecological reorientation of our territories, contemplating the multidimensionality of the ground offers an opportunity to integrate its tangible and intangible dimensions.

This publication traces the dialogue of a conference held at the University of Bologna on 10 December 2021. The conference aimed to transcend disciplinary boundaries, inviting speakers from across fields around the globe and striving not only for convivial discussions but for a convivial environment. As the paper contributions by Francesca Sabatini, Kevin Santus, Marco Manfra and Davide Turrini show, if the moment we are living in is one of multiple crises, it is also the moment to prepare the ground for a renaissance. A renaissance that, if it ever happens, will require a shift in planning practice towards forms of community involvement capable of mobilising local energies, transforming the hierarchy of established values and experimenting with new forms of local development.

The publication attempts to get to the heart of these new forms by analysing three measures:

- Mapping the ground(s) means the act of description: how can we produce knowledge that reveals the relationship between humankind and the environment?
- Designing the ground(s) involves an active response to contemporary challenges: how can we imagine new rules and forms in the long term?
- Caring for the ground(s) encircles the act of prevention: a process of daily maintenance to generate a co-evolving relationship. Is it possible to strengthen (inter)dependency between the human and non-human world?

Through the examination of these pages, let us join in a co-creation process, working from the ground up to re-inhabit our territories in a more equitable way.

Mapping the Ground(s) means the act of description, a process that allows the generation of knowledge to reveal the bond between humanity and the environment. In this section, we analyse various examples of technological tools – such as digital

visualisations and 3D models – used not merely for their photorealistic qualities, but also – and primarily – as heuristic instruments capable of leading to new discoveries.

This becomes particularly apparent when the work is conducted in an interdisciplinary environment, allowing the virtuous integration and processing of various aspects from different disciplines within a model or visualisation.

Two research papers are presented here: “The Val di Sole blueprint: mapping dynamics assets for sustainable development of marginal territories in Alpine context” by Sara Favargiotti, Chiara Chioni and Margherita Pasquali, and “Habitats portraits: trans-scalar mapping as an exploratory tool to unveil the dynamics of inner areas in Marche region” by Maria Giada di Baldassarre, which are all part of the same PRIN project: “Branding4Resilience”. This project deals with the transformations of marginal territories in various Italian regions, adopting a trans-scalar and multidisciplinary approach.

In the first case, the preliminary results of the research unit of the University of Trento are presented. Here, data collection leads to the mapping of the spatial, ecological, and social elements of the territory, especially at a hydrological network level. This becomes an operational tool for co-design processes towards a territorial strategy based on the value of water.

In the second case, the paper illustrates a part of the author’s doctoral research, where trans-scalar mapping allows for the exploration and discovery of territorial dynamics. This especially occurs through the eyes of the planner, who captures the positive and critical aspects through an integrated reading and a holistic approach, leading to the generation of new knowledge.

Starting from the layering process of the city as a description of the complexity of contemporary reflections between humankind, architecture, design, and ecosystem, **Designing the Ground(s)** has gathered research that brings the territory into a systemic perspective. The Ground(s) was perceived as the empty space that, by connecting different elements in relation to each other, forms an organised and global

unity. In this perspective, among the papers selected for the conference, Ground(s) was the tool for the future articulation and qualification of the territory, from small to large scale, a flexible and adaptable element that considers time as its main component. And if imagining new models requires creativity and innovation, it also demands strong political and social will.

Within the featured articles we see how Ground(s) was designed according to different perspectives: as a condenser of knowledge, able to restore the dialectic between unity and fragment, continuity and discontinuity, identity and difference, as a platform able to help define design standards to establish rules with the organisation of public space as the main objective or as a territory extendable in its boundaries and composition to implement new connections.

Two research papers are presented here: "Sailing the Farm. Three Projects about Ground and Its Politics onto Water Surfaces" by Matteo Vianello and "Designing the Accessibility of Ground(s) through Data and Design-Driven Methods" by Margherita Ascari and Virginia Vignali.

In the first paper, the author presents a research focused on how in areas like the Netherlands and coastal U.S. cities, architects are utilising water surfaces for urban development to address land scarcity and complex food supply chains. Water surfaces offer flexible urban land use and local food production. The floating dairy farm in Rotterdam exemplifies this trend, rooted in countercultural and artistic projects since the late 1970s.

In the second paper the concept of Ground(s) encompasses functional, relational, and mediating spaces. This paper explores how to ensure these spaces are accessible and inclusive for sustainable development. Using case studies, it shows how creative and cultural disciplines can design such spaces with an intersectional approach, empowering individuals as drivers of sustainable change, and leveraging digitisation and data for inclusive narratives.

Caring for Ground(s) involves pre-emptive actions: a daily practice of maintenance that fosters a co-evolving relationship. This continuous interaction creates a symbiotic bond where human efforts to care

for the environment are complemented by the ecosystems' ability to provide resources and maintain ecological balance. By emphasising this relationship and recognising the critical role of ecosystems in supporting biodiversity and regulating natural processes, we can strengthen the interdependence between the human and non-human. This enhanced cooperation leads to a more resilient and harmonious coexistence, ensuring the sustainability of both human communities and the natural world they depend upon. Three key research pieces are presented: "Caring for Infrastructural Grounds: A Research Agenda" by Leonardo Ramondetti, "Four Revisions Toward an Embodied Landscape Architecture Practice" by Alice Lewis, and "The Need to Design the Energy Ground" by Fabrizio D'Angelo.

Ramondetti's research emphasises the importance of caring for infrastructural grounds not just theoretically but through active design. He identifies three key categories of contemporary infrastructural grounds—grounds of storage, grounds of exploitation, and grounds of regulation—examining a representative space for each of them.

Lewis's research explores four landscape architectural concepts to incorporate the generative power of citizen action, emphasising that environmental stewardship should be driven by community involvement rather than solely by landscape architects. The revisions focus on discursive sites, embodied actions, facilitation, and tactical urban opportunities, highlighting the importance of citizens as catalysts for landscape care.

D'Angelo's contribution addresses the relationship between ground and energy, detailing significant spatial transformative trends in energy transition. His study advocates for a new culture of energy spaces aimed at achieving a balanced transition. He highlights compelling examples from Northeast Italy focused on reducing conflicts, disparities, and environmental pressures.

The diversity of topics allowed for an exploration of the numerous and intertwined relationships that develop around the theme of Ground(s). The conference unified three fundamental and interconnected themes - Mapping the Ground(s),

Designing the Ground(s), and Caring for the Ground(s) - as a framework for understanding and reshaping our relationship with the environment. A framework for producing knowledge, imagining sustainable futures, and fostering a symbiotic relationship between humanity and the natural world.

In conclusion, the conference provided us with a clear and articulated vision of how we can interact more consciously and sustainably with our environment. An integrated approach that combines knowledge, creative design, and sustainable practices and enables us all to address contemporary environmental challenges. In this perspective, the combination of mapping, designing, and caring for the Ground(s) offers a comprehensive, interdisciplinary perspective that can guide us towards a more sustainable and interconnected future.

