

PROCEEDINGS
of the
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
on
CHANGING CITIES VI
Spatial, Design, Landscape, Heritage & Socio-economic Dimensions



Changing Cities VI, Rhodes, 24 - 28 June 2024

Edited by
Prof. Aspa Gospodini
University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece

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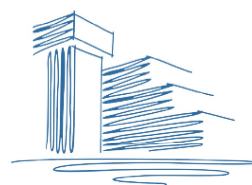
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Tel. UMLAB: +3024210.74460-74422 • e-mail: umlab@uth.gr

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When resilience meets creativity. Art and culture to face climate change in waterfront cities

N. Chrysikou^{1,2}, G. Luciani^{3*}

¹PhD Candidate, School of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

²Adjunct Lecturer, School of Design Sciences, Department of Interior Architecture, International Hellenic University, Serres, Greece

³Post-doc Researcher, Department of Architecture, University of Florence, Italy

*Corresponding author: E-mail: giulia.luciani@unifi.it, Tel +39 3343552595

Abstract

Global communities are coping with the impacts of climate change in multiple ways. The spatial configuration of waterfront cities makes them vulnerable to extreme events and natural hazards, threatening infrastructures, lives, and livelihoods. Therefore, direct and indirect effects are anticipated in coastal communities, including both material and lived aspects of culture. On the other hand, according to the IPCC, the warming of the atmosphere and the oceans is due to anthropogenic changes, i.e. the way we live on earth and occupy space, the modes of production, consumption and lifestyles. These findings highlight the cultural dimensions of the causes of climate change and, at the same time, the cultural dimension of human responses. The case of the waterfront redevelopment of the Royal Seaport in Stockholm provides an insight into the intertwining themes of sustainability, adaptation, and the critical role of culture. A new neighbourhood, the flagship project of Stockholm's urban development strategy, is currently being developed in the port area, taking advantage of partially decommissioned industrial sites. Design proposals for the Royal Seaport site were drafted and discussed during the SOS Climate Waterfront Workshop held in Stockholm, Sweden, in May-June 2022. This paper reflects on the strategies and design tools proposed for the area by students and researchers within the frame of the workshop. The project *Hazarts* proposes a vision of a neighbourhood where our vulnerability to risks and hazards, as well as the many interrelations we depend upon, is displayed through art, with a focus on education and awareness. Green and blue infrastructures transform space into a flexible and multifunctional public space that absorbs disturbances while maintaining its functions, providing a safe place for cultural and artistic activities to stimulate a new attitude towards change, vulnerability, coexistence, and mutual interdependence.

Keywords: *waterfront cities; climate change; culture and creativity; flexibility; public space.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In times of unprecedented environmental disruption and social-ecological unbalances, creating long-term solutions with effective and innovative approaches to foster resilient cities, design sustainable urban waterfronts, and enhance the health and well-being of waterfront communities is crucial for maintaining the vitality of waterfront areas.

It is on this premise that the Marie Curie Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (MSCA-RISE) programme *S.O.S. – Sustainable Open Solutions for European urban waterfronts (SOS Climate Waterfront)* was set up. With seven cities involved from different latitudes of Europe - Rome, Thessaloniki, Stockholm, Lisbon, Gdańsk, Ankara, and Amsterdam - it aimed to enhance a sustainable research framework for the discussion of solutions and strategies, through a multi-disciplinary approach, building on conferences and design workshops held in the participating cities, where international researchers from various disciplines worked with students from the hosting institution to discuss scenarios and develop creative design proposals for the selected study areas [1].

Having participated as international researchers in the workshop held in Stockholm, the authors' aim in this contribution is to stimulate, starting from the design workshop output, a discussion concerning the role of culture and creativity to face the impacts of climate change. First, the paper develops a review of current policies and scientific literature concerning culture and creativity in the context of cities facing climate change and is followed by the presentation of a case study, the Royal Seaport area redevelopment in Stockholm, which was the selected study area for the SOS Climate Waterfront workshop. Being a large port-industrial area, the Royal Seaport's redevelopment proceeds gradually, in stages involving smaller sub-areas, of which only one has been completed to date. This allows for a provisional comparison between the results of the first realisation phases and the concept proposed as a result of the design workshop for the adjacent sub-area, still waiting to be transformed.

2. THE FIVE Cs: CITIES, CULTURE, CREATIVITY, CLIMATE CHANGE

Waterfront cities are vulnerable to extreme events and natural hazards at multiple scales and dimensions. Sea-level rise, extreme weather events, flooding, ice sheets, and various crises or shocks threaten infrastructures, lives, and livelihoods. Several direct and indirect effects are anticipated in communities, including both tangible (e.g. cultural heritage and historic buildings, sites, objects and artworks) and intangible (e.g. cultural values, identities, knowledge and language) aspects of culture, threatening cultural security [2] and underlining the cultural dimension of climate change impacts.

On the other hand, according to the 2021 IPCC report [3], the warming of the atmosphere and the oceans is due to anthropogenic changes, i.e. the way we live on Earth and occupy space, the modes of production, consumption and lifestyles that give rise to greenhouse gas emissions. These findings highlight the cultural dimension both of the causes of climate change and of the adaptive responses to climate-related risks. This means that adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change require integrated approaches to changing the way we live and act on the planet, which is intrinsically interdependent with our worldviews and value systems [4], i.e. our culture(s). In 2014, the aim of the *Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme* [5] was to promote the adoption of sustainable lifestyles as the common norm at all levels and in diverse contexts. According to Light et al. [6], changes of this magnitude could be achieved by introducing creative practices into the process which are able to affect emotions, thus, it is more likely to influence the willingness to engage in pro-environmental behaviour, achieve a shift in self-identity and long-term change.

Creativity, closely linked to cultural and art practices, is associated with originality, imagination, inspiration, and innovation and contributes to sustainable development [7]. By targeting values and attitudes [8], it provides the appropriate context for people to develop creative thinking and act imaginatively in pursuit of change, which in turn will generate diverse positive outcomes in cities at different scales and dimensions [6].

Additionally, the cultural shift towards strengthening social bonds, trust and social cohesion forms the foundation for vulnerable communities to develop appropriate mechanisms for recovering from natural disasters and coping with such stressors. For Blatchford and Young [9], culture and creativity go beyond their ability to shape identities and behaviours and are survival strategies that should be considered an essential part of any community's resilience toolkit. The contribution of cultural heritage in this sense is highlighted in the ICOMOS 2019 report *Future of Our Pasts: Engaging Cultural Heritage in Climate Action*, [10], as well as in the White Paper *Cultural Heritage and Climate Change* [11], stressing the embeddedness of culture and heritage in their socio-environmental contexts. Moreover, Fabricatti et al [12] note that the collaborative actions of heritage care and conservation, implicit in the definition of heritage communities proposed by the Faro Convention on the value of cultural heritage for society [13], can establish a virtuous cycle, strengthening social cohesion while reducing environmental degradation and stimulating urban regeneration.

The relationship between culture and the SDGs, set by the UN in 2015, is quite paradoxical. The 2013 UNESCO Hangzhou Declaration [14], emphasized the need for culture to be integrated into the post-

2015 development agenda with a dedicated cultural goal, as a driving force and enabler for sustainable development. However, culture is not among the 17 goals, and is rarely mentioned in a direct and specific way in a few of them (4.7, 8.9, 11.4, and 12.B). Although efforts to combat climate change have been on the world agenda for decades, greenhouse gas emissions still increasing [15] and global warming continuing apace [16], indicating a failure of climate change governance [4, 17, 18]. To accelerate change, turn good intentions into actions and redefine the role of culture and creativity in the context of sustainable development and climate, mass participation is required [18].

In the current global debate, culture is increasingly recognised in studies, works, policy initiatives and practices as a key driver of sustainable development for the achievement of the SDGs in the context of climate change mitigation and adaptation. In 2018, the report of World Cities Culture Forum on *Culture and Climate Change* [19], demonstrates impactful projects that highlight the convergence of cultural and environmental policy at the city level and aims to accelerate cultural action on climate change. It includes projects that promote citizen engagement, awareness and disaster preparedness, and the regeneration of urban environments through the provision of common public spaces, the preservation and integration of cultural heritage into public life, public engagement, environmental development and cultural involvement. It identifies cities as collaborative commons and serves as a significant tool which can influence, inspire and lead future city policies in addressing environmental and climate challenges through cultural creative actions. The *Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda* [20], developed in 2019 by UNESCO for measuring and monitoring culture's contribution to the national and local implementation of the SDGs, aims to assess both the role of culture as a sector of activity and its cross-cutting contribution to different goals, targets and policies. In particular, all four dimensions of the proposed indicators highlight the interconnection between culture and the SDGs through a variety of bidirectional relationships. They aim to assess the spatial aspects of the quality of public spaces and cultural infrastructure, the contribution of culture to the transmission of local cultural values, knowledge and skills, and the promotion of inclusion and participation. They focus on equal access to cultural life, cultural education and creative freedom and expression. They assess the level of cities' commitment to the protection of cultural and natural heritage and to culturally sensitive planning and management. Finally, education for adaptation to climate change, the adoption of a sustainable consumption culture and the acquisition of skills for sustainable development are highlighted as separate objectives. The *New European Bauhaus* [21], launched by the European Commission in 2020, is a creative and interdisciplinary policy initiative that identifies cities as hubs of innovation where art, culture and creativity play a key role in assisting green transition, while building sustainable and inclusive communities through collaboration between citizens, experts, artists and institutions, experimentation and connection in its public spaces. The European Cultural Heritage Green Paper *Putting Europe's shared heritage at the heart of the European Green Deal* [22], produced by Europa Nostra in cooperation with ICOMOS and the Climate Heritage Network, aims at demonstrating the relevance of cultural heritage for achieving the goals of the European Green Deal, thus also enriching the New European Bauhaus by stressing the importance of including heritage side to side with culture and creativity [23].

The above documents attribute to culture and creativity a cross-sectoral dimension, strongly linked with all pillars of sustainability. They also make clear that for culture to be effective and for its transformative power to be scaled up towards the desired cultural change, collaboration between different groups - experts, scientists, researchers, artists, stakeholders and citizens – is essential. Such collaborations go beyond awareness-raising because they influence the way of thinking and living on Earth. Soden et al. [24] argue that this is due to art's ability to interpret and communicate scientific outputs (charts, diagrams and risk models) - which are often incomprehensible to the general public - in innovative, effective and attractive ways, addressing the emotional elements of the climate crisis and thus, transform cross-disciplinary cultural and creative actions into platforms for transformative processes. Both *Culture and Climate Change* and *New European Bauhaus*, through a variety of

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actions in open public spaces in cities, promote inclusion and public engagement in the process, creating favourable conditions for knowledge dissemination - to a wider audience - and shared learning through creative cultural practices. Therefore, it is understood that since urban public spaces provide the essential space for cultural expression, participation and contact [25], when combined with cross-sectoral collaborative and creative cultural practices, this encounter can accelerate transformations; especially when politically supported and legitimised [18].

3. STOCKHOLM'S ROYAL SEAPORT REDEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY

The redevelopment of the Royal Seaport area in Stockholm – locally known as Norra Djurgårdsstaden – has been discussed and implemented over a wide time span, beginning in the Nineties and continuing until the present day. As large as 236 hectares, the area was the first working class suburb in Stockholm, accommodating since the end of the XIX Century industrial and port uses, including gasworks buildings, an electric plant, and the largest port of the city, as well as a residential area in the higher part. Part of the buildings have been decommissioned, while others, such as the electric plant, are going to stay in function. The plan for the port itself is to keep it active by integrating it into the future neighbourhood.

The Royal Seaport project is considered strategic by the policy documents first because of its location, well connected to the city centre, bordered by the Baltic Sea, and surrounded by the Royal National City Park, the major green wedge penetrating the city, second, because of the industrial heritage available for new “exciting uses” [26]. Once completed, the new Royal Seaport should accommodate at least 12.000 housing units, 35.000 working places, and 600.000 square metres of commercial activities. In 2015, the first construction phase came to an end, with the realisation of the Northern part of the project, a new neighbourhood placed between the existing working-class residential area of Hjorthagen, the gasworks, and the Royal National City Park. By examining the policy document “Sustainable Urban Development Programme” [26], the dedicated website [27], and the realised neighbourhood, a first evaluation concerning the use of culture and heritage can be attempted.

The Royal Seaport is presented as a model of urban sustainability to the international public, following the wide recognition obtained by the Hammarby Sjöstad district redevelopment, pursuing a sustainability profile based on technological innovation, in line with the Swedish policies [28]. This objective also aims at consolidating Stockholm's role as a leader in the sector: as the then mayor and vice mayor clearly stated in 2010, the Royal Seaport would “support the marketing of Swedish environmental technology and contribute to the development of new technology that will cover all housing construction in Stockholm, Sweden and the rest of the world” [29].

Sustainability is linked, in the project's statements, to cultural heritage as a means to build and strengthen identity, narratives, and sense of place. Cultural heritage valorisation is achieved by contrast through the search for a dialogue between the old and the new [30], within a perspective that considers natural and cultural heritage not as static data but as co-evolving with the city. A strategic planning approach facilitates the integration of the disciplines of urban planning and heritage conservation, opening new opportunities for a creative reuse of heritage. This kind of gesture is not neutral to the cultural and historic meanings of the pre-existing elements: heritage becomes a bearer of new values and meanings, compatible with its history but closer to the contemporary mindsets. The project is what selects meanings to be valued and reinterprets them as functional to the vision it aims at promoting. Such an approach can offer stimulating possibilities by departing from a logic of rigid constraints, but is not immune from major drawbacks. As a demonstration of how tangible these worries can be, we can compare how different heritages were treated in the already completed part of the Royal Seaport.

The gasworks – Värtagasverket – are a valuable complex of brick buildings designed by architect Ferdinand Boberg dating back to 1893. Shortly after their construction, to accommodate the growing number of workers, the city began to build housing units on the adjacent hill of Hjorthagen. The

neighbourhood grew throughout the first half of the XX century until the Sixties, and provides today a unique testimony of the historical evolution of social housing models in Sweden. Particularly relevant is the Abessinien housing complex, designed by Hakon Ahlberg in the Thirties and inspired by functionalist principles. Both Värtagasverket and Abessinien are classified as heritage goods of national interest with historical-cultural value [31]. While the gasworks have become the core and main identity symbol of the new neighbourhood, the pre-existing residential neighbourhood has been gradually marginalised while the project advanced. For instance, an emblematic decision was taken to relocate the public library to the newly built area, in a clear attempt to move the barycentre of the district's life, rather than the objective of integrating the old and the new the policy statements declared. This gesture can be viewed as representative of the will to privilege a specific kind of heritage and cultural meanings – that of technological development. This kind of industrial heritage is functional to promoting the image desired by the investors, and sustaining a model of elitist sustainability. As a matter of fact, the housing units in this area are going to be the most expensive in Stockholm, pushing the previous residents to move. On the contrary, a valorisation of the social housing heritage would have been coherent with an opposite vision, aiming to address the issue of housing accessibility, which is among the major social emergencies in the city.

It has been observed that the pre-existing neighbourhood could be seen as “standing in the way of the strategic framing of the project into a universal model for sustainable urban planning, because Hjorthagen adds the kind of localness and historical heritage which makes it more difficult to portray the area as a universal role model for sustainable urban planning” [32]. As Choay [33] puts it, a set of losses including de-memorisation and semantic de-complexification, resulting from the process of globalisation and mondialisation, are at work in the redevelopment of the urban space.

This process has to be seen as inherently de-politicising. Port waterfronts, carrying histories of inequalities and class struggles, are subject to heritagisation processes where only the interpretations of the hegemonic groups are accounted for, namely those related to innovation, symbolised through certain material structures and technological features, while aspects connected to social relations and working-class struggle are marginalised. The expression 'heritage sanitification' [34] has also been used to describe such processes where narratives are simplified through the removal of controversial elements, in order to attract a wider public.

4. THE WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE: HAZARTS DESIGN PROPOSAL

The design proposal for Södra Värtan, part of the wider Royal Seaport area, was developed by Group VI within the frame of the *SOS Climate Waterfront* workshop held in Stockholm, in May-June 2022. The site analysis, based on data collection from urban planning documents and historical archives, site visits and guided tours of the wider area and supported by lectures from experts and academics, revealed valuable insights into the challenges, opportunities and weaknesses of the study area and framed the guidelines of the design approach.

If the city of Stockholm literally consists of islands, the area of Södra Värtan was interpreted by the group metaphorically as an island in perception. Lower than its surroundings due to topographical conditions and with a hard border marked by a dismissed railway, the area is disconnected from the city - despite being only a short distance from the centre - and the nearby green areas, thus contributing to keeping the waterfront out of the social and urban fabric. At the same time, the presence of historically significant structures, the proximity of contemporary creative hubs, social housing, industrial uses and port activities further contribute to the multifaceted identity of the area, which serves as a nexus of contrast and transition. This complex urban fabric, therefore, introduces a set of challenges related to interconnection, integration and balanced coexistence of natural and cultural resources within the context of urban development. On the other hand, the potential impact of sealed and contaminated soil, flooding risks and diverse hazards, water pollution and air quality,

the protection of the natural environment and biodiversity, the safeguarding of food safety and security and other climate change challenges are also considered in the design proposal.

Being aware of the centrality that the port activities have at present and are going to maintain in the future - also due to the increasing number of passengers reaching Stockholm by sea - the renewal project starts with the idea of transforming Södra Värtan from a transit space into a destination place for tourists and local people. The undefined intermediate space opens up to the Baltic Sea, and is transformed into a flexible and multifunctional public space that welcomes new uses to coexist with the old, restores the cohesion with the city, the green areas, and the sea. *Hazarts* incorporates a vision for a neighbourhood where vulnerability to risks and hazards is displayed through art and culture, with a focus on the importance of education and awareness of the many interrelations we depend on to build resilience and adaptation. Thus, the design approach is grounded on the identification, preservation, promotion, integration, and enhancement of the cultural and creative potential of the study area as necessary components of adaptation and resilience. The cultural and artistic dimension is emphasised with the aim of converting the area into an inclusive creative harbour for different cultures to meet, connect, learn, and co-create with respect to humans and nature.

The proposed design encourages walking and cycling over driving and promotes the use of public transport by extending existing lines and creating a transport node through the adaptive reuse of the old station, reinserting this historic building into the urban scene. The remaining heritage assets are integrated into the new development as part of a cultural corridor, which “hugs” the hill of Hjorthagen and acts as a connector, allowing the creative reuse of built heritage to serve as a backbone. This cultural corridor, as it runs through the area to Lidingö, articulates history, cultures, people and knowledge, and in synergy with the public realm, the artists and the new natural hazards research institute (conceived as a floating landmark) offers multiple, diverse and alternative approaches to educate on issues related to climate change hazards, mitigation, adaptation and resilience (e.g. exhibitions, workshops, seminars, video projections, agricultural skills, etc.).

To address the challenges of climate change, the proposal incorporates sustainable strategies based on green-blue adaptive infrastructure that welcomes different forms of change related to water, while strengthening the interfaces between humans, non-human species and nature. The integration of public waterway networks, the construction of wetlands, the promotion of porosity and rainwater harvesting systems achieve the absorption, storage, treatment and management of water, as well as biodiversity and sustainable human and natural ecosystems; furthermore, they create a social, educational, and experiential platform for the community (Figures 1, 2).

Hazarts proposes a culturally sensitive urban planning where green and blue infrastructure and technology transform space into a flexible, adaptable, and multifunctional public space that absorbs disturbances while maintaining its functions. Therefore, it provides a safe place that becomes the breeding ground for the development of cultural and artistic activities to stimulate a new attitude towards change, vulnerability, coexistence, and mutual interdependence.

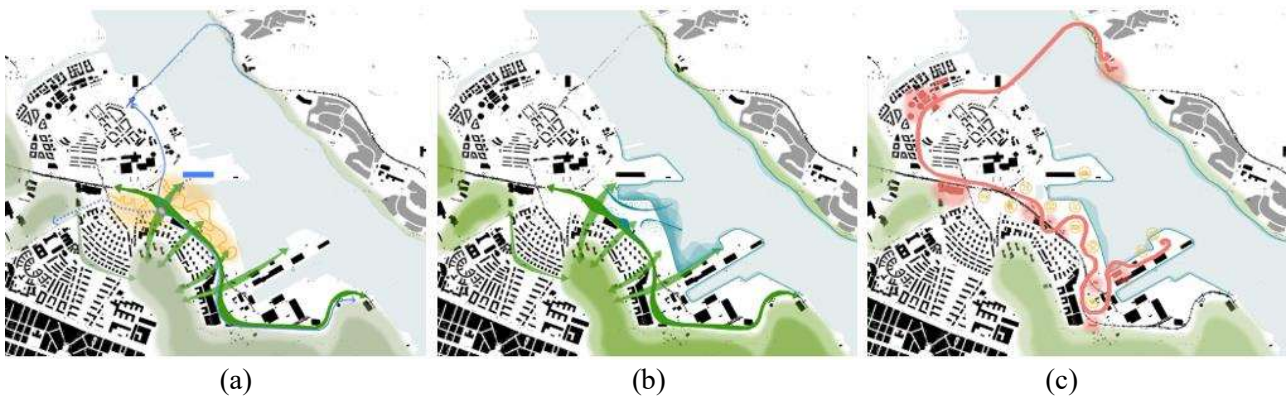


Figure 1. Project Goals: (a) Connections and relations, (b) Green and blue infrastructure, (c) Art and Culture to face risk and hazards



Figure 2. Master plan

5. WHEN RESILIENCE MEETS CREATIVITY: A CONCLUSION

Through a literature and policy review, this paper shows how cultural and creative mediation in all urban practices and policies can gather the requisite knowledge and serve as a lever for cross-sectoral learning and dialogue, inspiring communities, stakeholders, policy makers and governance systems with new, inventive and sustainable solutions to address climate change and the environmental unbalances in contemporary urban areas. Ultimately, by triggering new living experiences, such approaches – it is stated - can bring about the necessary systemic changes to move cities beyond the current impasse and towards a sustainable future on Earth.

However, practice can be quite different from theory. Through a case study analysis of Stockholm's Royal Seaport partial redevelopment, it is pointed out how culture and cultural inheritance can be simplified into instrumental narratives which tend to homogenise the coping mechanisms into a single, technology-driven, and marketable formula, rather than stimulate creative, locally-driven, and

therefore rich in diversity - which is the premise of resilience in the natural world – innovation/retroinnovation [35] to deal with the environmental crisis. This perspective can offer food for reflection - as in the experience of the design workshop - as a reminder of the substantial gap standing between policy statements, design concept, and actual realisation. The case of Hjorthagen sounds as a warning for any proposal to be aware of how delicate the steps from concept to construction are, especially if the many interests that may instrumentalise the design are considered. Being aware that any evaluation must consider such issues, it can anyway be emphasised that the background and overall aim of the proposed *Hazarts* concept arise from quite a different standpoint. Taking a step back from the dominant ecomodernist paradigm [36] and its off-the-shelf solution of a technological fix, its approach is at the same time more modest and more radical, sustained by the belief that, somehow paradoxically, placing human intervention in a humbler position has higher potential, as a strategy, to steer real systemic change. The project suggests to display human vulnerability and interdependence rather than human power to change the environment, aiming at stimulating a creative renewal of ecological relational thinking. Vulnerability, indeed, has been interpreted as a precondition of resilience from a socio-ecological co-evolutionary perspective, where human and non-human systems are considered as related to each other through a continuous reciprocal action-feedback process [37]. Green/ blue infrastructures are seen as part of this struggle to trigger renovated intercourse with natural processes, which rather than controlled or mimicked through engineered solutions are accompanied in their evolution and cyclical change by human care. The design proposal, through the image of a cultural corridor, conveys an idea of connection through culture, an invitation to develop a place-specific – though built dialogically, speaking to and with alternative worldviews – ecological culture, through an unbinding of individual and collective creativity. The meaning of education, in this context, is of a sort of maieutical, active and interactive approach, in contrast to prescriptive one-way educational systems. Flexibility of public space is here key to enable transformative practices. It contributes to inclusion reduction of inequalities, as it turns waterfront space into a safe place for individual and collective creative expression, fostering intergenerational and intercultural handover in space practice and management. Finally, *Hazarts* hopes to inspire a more reflexive attitude towards tangible and intangible inheritance from past generations, with specific attention to the multiple layering of meanings, leaving the question open to collective discussion about what should be transmitted to the future generations and how. A landscape approach, valuing interrelations rather than isolated landmarks may contribute to deeper, more complex and stratified understandings of the role of material heritage, cultural meanings, and creative practices in shaping the ecologies of the future.

Author Contributions

The present paper is a joint work of the two authors. However, paragraphs 1, 3 and 5 were written by Giulia Luciani, while paragraphs 2 and 4 were written by Natalia Chrysikou.

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