

Living on Earth

Towards a garden metropolis

Proximate living can be organized in different forms and scales, going from a few dwellings to several hundred ones. Viewed on a larger scale, it becomes an urban system in its own right, one that considers the periphery as a specific form complementary to the city center, an open form that is resilient in time. It anticipates the vision of a garden metropolis.

In his book "The new City; principles of planning", published in 1944, German architect and urban planner Ludwig Hilberseimer develops his approach to urban planning based on a total interdependence between architecture and urbanism. He classifies urban developments into two categories: the organic form and the geometric form. According to him, the organic form, linked to a mystic culture, is associated with a free community, determined as much by each individual component as the whole. The geometric form, linked to a magical culture, is associated with an autocratic community with individual construction subordinated to a planning principle. Although they rarely exist in their pure form, Hilberseimer argues that one can always detect one of two trends by observing any type of urbanization on earth and in history.

Cities nowadays are almost completely planned, through regulations, standards, development projects... Their organic image, that so many people seem to treasure, hides an organized reality that depends on clear planning principles, and the horizontal city is no exception. Observing how zoning and regulations shape cities in France, it is quite clear that even this territory is geometric, in the sense in which Hilberseimer understood it. And it needs to be. In order to control climate change and the multiple challenges it brings, we need to plan ahead.

Today, the transformation of the horizontal city is led either through the creation of new dense districts, mostly labeled eco-towns or garden cities, or by the densification of individual plots, with incentives such as BIMBY ("build in my backyard"). The first alternative, new denser districts, is often in complete contradiction with the context in which it implants itself, creating autonomous islands in the landscape. The second, individual densification, is more of an acupuncture: the scale of the individual house alone, no matter how dense it gets, will never be enough, and the future of the horizontal city cannot be left to single users alone.

Proximate living is the expression of a new philosophy of the garden metropolis. If we can project a radical evolution of the horizontal city, aiming for an intensified environment while keeping existing qualities such as horizontality, individual desire and need for nature, then we can begin to envision the garden metropolis as a place for new resilient living models. This demands a new organization of the territory, one where landscape and gardens become the preexisting structure that defines the rules for individual implementation and sets numbered objectives for density and collectivity. It advocates for the association of programs and people through landscape rather than separation.

The garden metropolis invites us to live on Earth in an open and shared landscape where boundaries are no longer a problem, without sacrificing private qualities. It then becomes possible to look at and understand how, within a common structure, each citizen can build their own narrative, while still participating in the emergence of a collective environment. [...]

Susanne Eliasson and Anthony Jammes, GRAU, 2022, extracts from *Living on Earth* (to be published)

Susanne Eliasson and **Anthony Jammes**, founded the architecture and urban design firm GRAU. They won the Palmarès des Jeunes Urbanistes in 2016. GRAU has worked at the intersection between architecture and urbanism for over ten years in France and across Europe, and has developed an expertise on issues related to housing through a wide range of urban renewal projects, strategic studies on densification, housing projects and different prospective studies.

For several years they have been working on the transformation and creation of garden cities, such as the cité Claveau in Bordeaux or the new Dames Blanches district in Brussels. Particularly interested in living conditions in low density areas, they have carried out research on the potential of the garden city, initiated in 2014 as part of the master plan for the Caudéran district in Bordeaux in collaboration with Michel and Claire Corajoud. This research took them to Phoenix, Arizona, where they studied collective housing projects built by the US architect Alfred N. Beadle.

In 2017, they published *Apprendre de Caudéran*, a book that looks at how the Caudéran district might be a prototype for a garden city.

In parallel with their activities at GRAU, Susanne Eliasson and Anthony Jammes teach respectively at the Peter Behrens School of Arts in Düsseldorf and the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Versailles. In 2021 Susanne was appointed architectural consultant for Bordeaux City Council.

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Making the city with housing is a current political and societal challenge. In the 1990's and early 2000's, the rediscovery of the European city center triggered an urban renewal in the form of new mixed-use neighborhoods. Today, the global housing crisis requires stakeholders to produce large quantities of housing, often in monofunctional settings. Housing has become a problem explained with—and expected to be solved by—numbers and the cost of housing, the number of units needed and various tax incentives make daily headlines in the news.

While the quality of housing units is a common concern among professionals, there is little critical research conducted on housing typologies today and close to none on the urban form that it generates. Yet, the way we produce housing is a matter of form that cannot be separated from the building process. It has strong physical implications on the way we shape our cities, especially when we are building whole areas from scratch.

A city with a form raises the question of its meaning and direction, and so it is often preferred that the form be as elusive as possible. And yet, in an effort to limit our movements, reduce our consumption of resources and change our way of life, the physical form of the city should be a central topic of discussion in order to define together the city that we will live in tomorrow. Housing is a reflexion of the city that exists and the city that we can build: it is a design problem, to which we can apply design solutions. [...]

Since the beginning of urbanisation, towns and cities have been places where people live together: for the opportunities and safety they provide, for economic reasons, to fulfil a need for social bonds, and all the other reasons that make us come together as people. Living together in a particular environment requires a kind of collective organisation that always manifests itself physically, and our urban structures also reflect our values and the challenges faced by society.

This exhibition deals with an urban organization we call the **Garden Metropolis**. Neither the centre nor the periphery, the term refers to urban growth that has mainly occurred in the twentieth century as a direct extension of major urban centres. Because it arises from a liberal world order and a market economy, we struggle to make sense of it, often considering it as a kind of uncontrollable chaos that is the "price to pay" so that we can all satisfy our individual desires: an environment shaped by boundaries and distance instead of by a desire to live together.

But this is a reductive view of reality. This kind of urbanisation exists all over the world; we have produced it in sometimes dizzying quantities, and now we have to deal with it, constantly transforming it and gradually adapting it. To achieve this, and to give it collective meaning, we have to look at it in detail and understand the specific processes that lie behind it.

The question of the "collective meaning" of cities preoccupies us every day. What makes us belong to a broader collective sphere? What minimal urban structures do we need to live together successfully? How close can we get to one another?

With "Garden Metropolis", we suggest looking at things in a new way and considering urban sprawl not merely as a string of residential areas but as one of the urban forms of the future. We do this by exploring its potential for transformation: as a city where landscape and the built environment work closely together, and where urban structure produces both individual wellbeing and collective meaning.

The exhibition explores the Garden Metropolis in four cities: Bordeaux, Phoenix, Brussels and Chicago—very different cities that nevertheless have points and concerns in common. In a world where we constantly seek to differentiate ourselves, we are using this exhibition as an opportunity to talk about what brings us together, to look elsewhere and learn from one another, without ever denying the specific characteristics of our cities and natural environments.

GRAU, Paris 2022

Métropole Jardin Garden Metropolis GRAU architectes

exhibition curatorship
GRAU:
Susanne Eliasson et Anthony Jammes,
architects urbanists
Something Els:
Els Vande Kerckhove,
graphic designer

exhibition
07 04 2022 → 02 10 2022
opening lecture
07 04 2022, 18:30

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Since 1981 arc en rêve centre d'architecture has elaborated a cultural awareness-building strategy focusing on contemporary architecture and extending into city planning, landscape design, aimed at broadening perceptions of a changing world. Its internationally recognised programme features exhibitions, lectures, public discussions, publications, workshops for children, seminars for adults, visits to buildings, city tours, and planning experiments.

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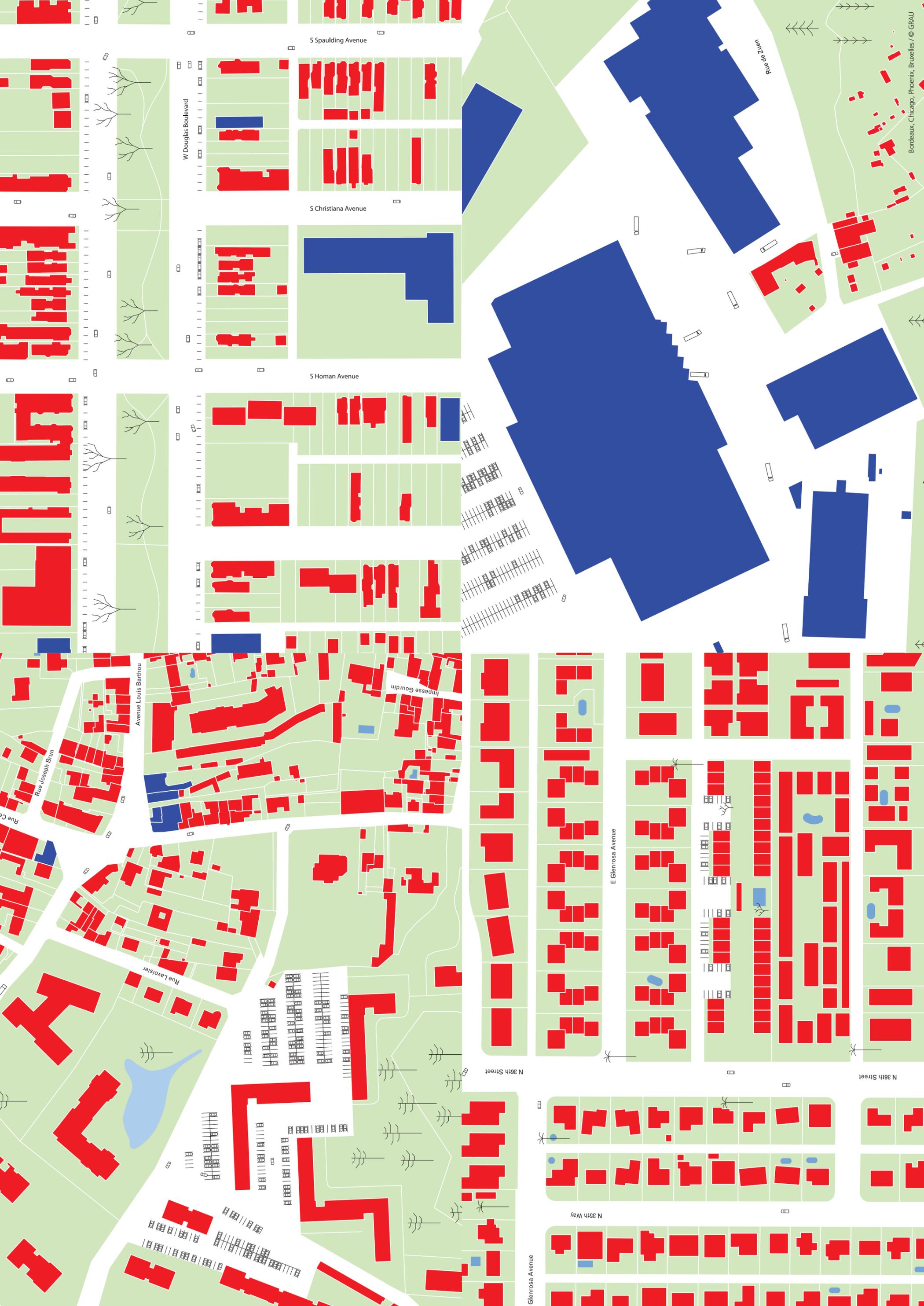
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