



PALIMPSEST

Creative Drivers for Sustainable
Living Heritage Landscapes

Creative actions for sustainability: The PALIMPSEST Project

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Politecnico di Milano

18th November, 2024



Funded by
the European Union



Connects **artistic, cultural and creative practices**, **environmental objectives** and **quality of space**

Promotes projects that intervene to make places “beautiful, sustainable and inclusive”

Supports participatory processes, the inclusion of different actors at multiple levels and the adoption of transdisciplinary approaches

PALIMPSEST – Creative Drivers for Sustainable Living Heritage Landscapes



New European Bauhaus
HORIZON-CL2-2022-
HERITAGE-01 – Shaping a
greener and fairer way of life
in creative and inclusive
societies through
Architecture, Design and
Arts

15 + partner
Research
Culture and Creativity
Local actors

3 years (from March, 2023)



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the European Union**



PALIMPSEST Questions



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Land as PALIMPSEST
(Corboz, 1983), understood as
"a stratified warehouse of
objects, signs and their
meanings" (Secchi, 1998),
which become visible in the
landscape



What actions and ways of acting can enhance the capacity of territories - and landscapes that become visible in them - to respond to contemporary climate and environmental crises? What role can creativity play in transforming fragile landscapes towards a sustainability horizon? What operational approach can allow architects, designers and artists to work together with scientists, local institutions and communities? How can these alliances contribute to landscape transformation and, at the same time, support creative agents?

What are “landscapes”?

multiple definitions

multiple dimensions

- *physical/material*
- *discursive/perceived*
 - *lived/experienced*

**landscapes can prompt inquiry
into our "being in the world"**

How do landscapes change?

Everything we do affect landscapes
(Nuñez, 2023, interview)

Landscapes have a direct relationship with human "acting", which is not only a mere extension of a thinking process but is, perhaps primarily, a way of thinking and reasoning
(Sacco, 2023, interview)



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How do landscapes change?

through **practices**

= actions – “from ephemeral doings to stable long-term patterns of activity” (Rouse, 2007: 639) – that actively shape the space, affecting its material and intangible components



How do landscapes change?

through **individual & collective processes of value attribution**



through **practices**

physical / discursive / lived space

How do landscapes change?

through **socio-economic restructuring and territorial processes**



through **individual & collective processes of value attribution**

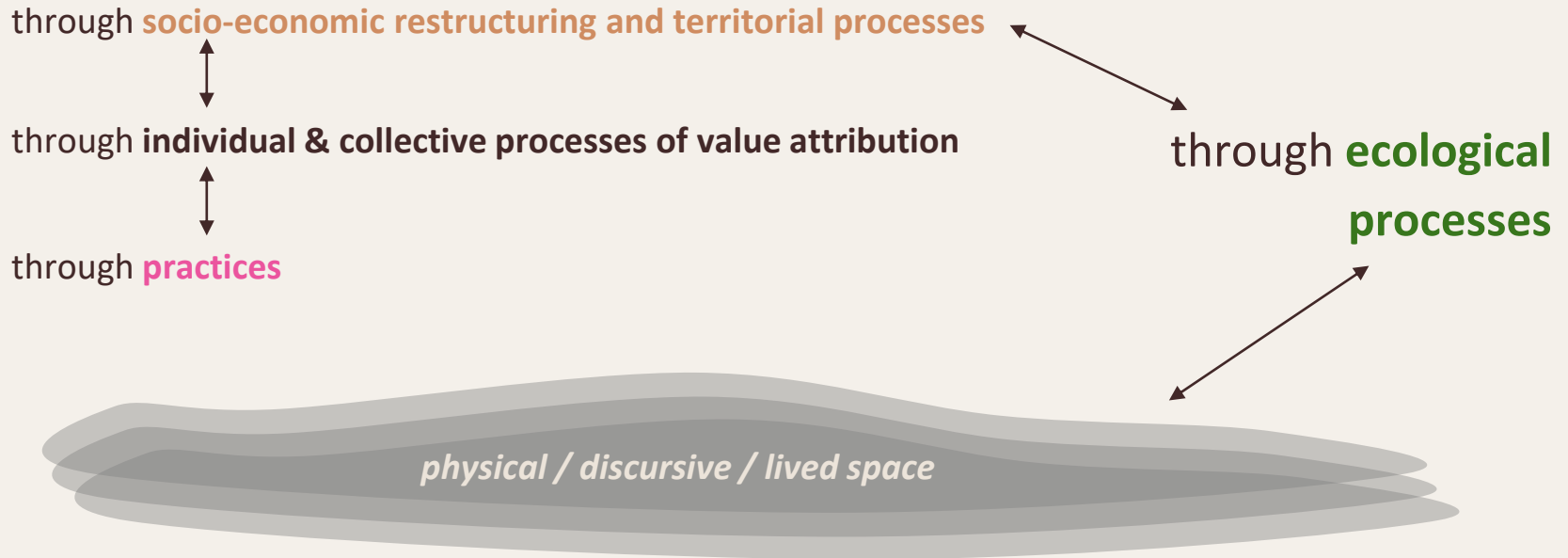


through **practices**

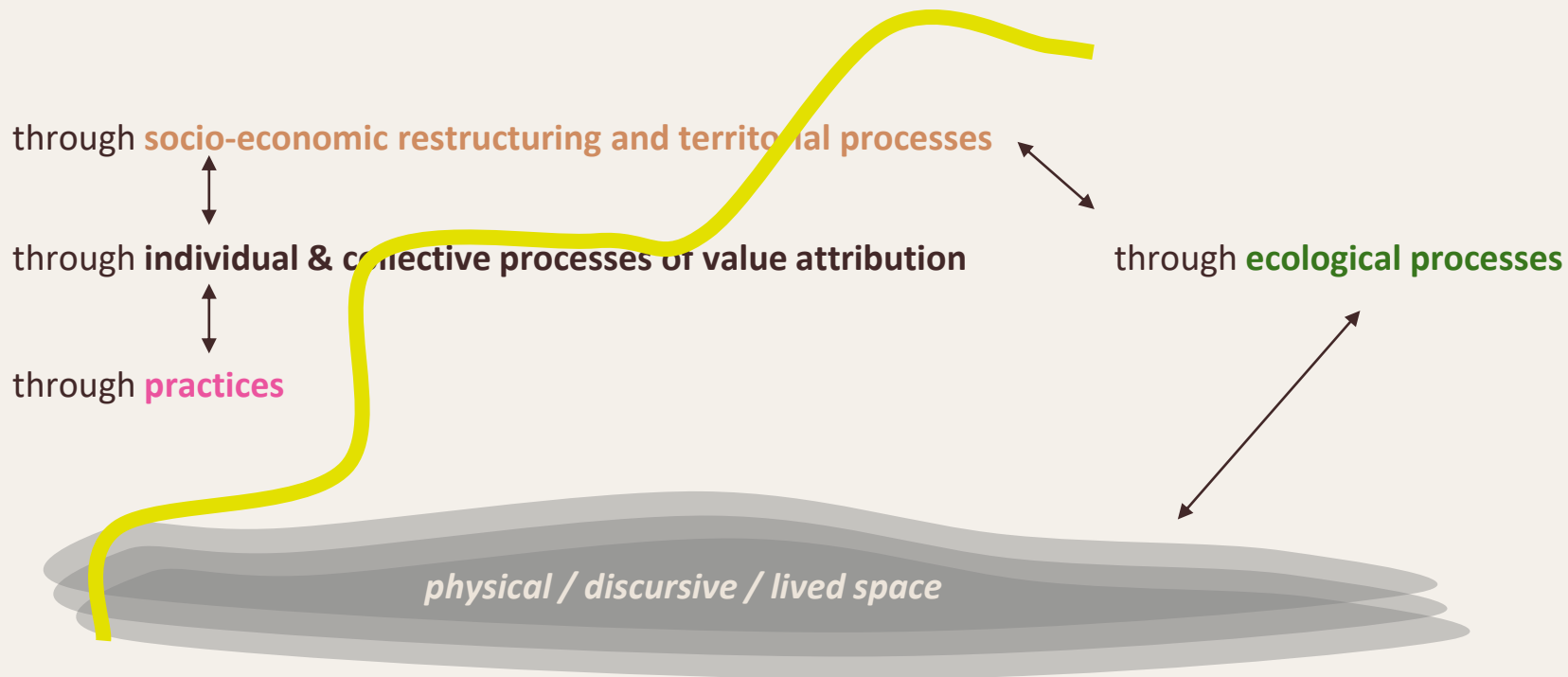


physical / discursive / lived space

How do landscapes change?



How is the environmental & climate crisis impacting landscapes?



How is the environmental & climate crisis impacting landscapes?

...this crisis is systemic and pervade various aspects of human life and actions.

Tangible landscape dimension

- production of climatic risks
- conflicts over land and resource use
- trade-offs among scales, communities, and sectors with conflicting interests (IPCC, 2022).

Intangible dimension

- loosening of intangible relationships within communities and between communities and the territories they inhabit.
- loss of heritage value
- loss of “wisdom”

What role for creative actions?

1. Redefining imaginaries and meanings

Provide **alternative ways of framing and understanding** landscape dynamics, sustainability challenges and their context-specific implications.

Imagine **unexplored possibilities** for landscape transformation

Create visible values through interventions in a specific time and space, also contributing to creating new meanings and narratives

Reconnect landscapes with their "**living heritage**" dimension

Arise **emotions**

What role for creative actions?

2. Creating alliances

Encourage individuals and groups to identify, shape, and adopt **shared values**

Mediate across different logics and frames

Creating room for unforeseen and "**unprovable connections**"

Give voice to **multiple voices**, including non-human and non-living ones.

Support participation by suggesting **new ways of expression**

What role for creative actions?

3. Transforming practices

Challenge thinking and doing schemes

Drive behavioural change

Experiment with alternative ways of acting and (inter)acting "in" and "with" the landscape

Introduce —creative, aesthetic and symbolic— value into specific productive processes



PALIMPSEST Concept



Climate and environmental crisis as an imperative for change in action and thinking

POLICY LEVEL

norms/rules regulations

COLLECTIVE/SOCIAL LEVEL

perceptions, attitudes, behaviours, habits

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

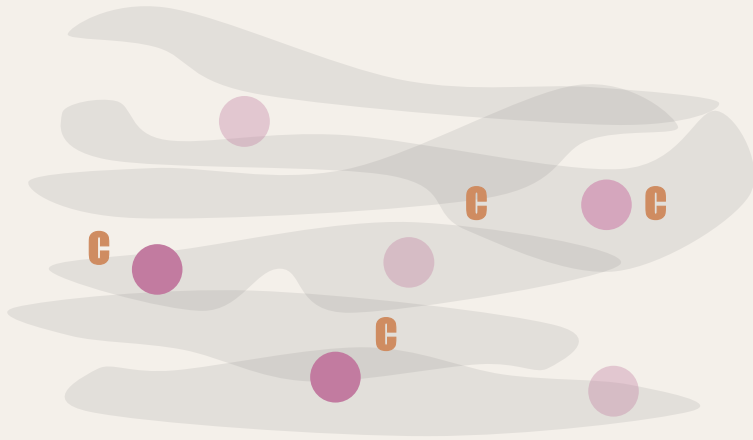
perception, framing of the problem, attitudes
and behaviours, ways of knowing, habits



Sustainability as an aspirational horizon

not as a “characteristic” of landscapes or of their subsystems, but rather as a guiding horizon necessary to support visioning and experimentation (in line with a mission-oriented approach, see Mazzucato, 2018).

Creative actions as drivers of change



What is the value of creative actions in landscape transformations?

How can they integrate with existing practices and encourage new ones?

How can they intersect with other logics that shape transformation of space?

Can they play a role in orienting landscape transformations towards a sustainability horizon?



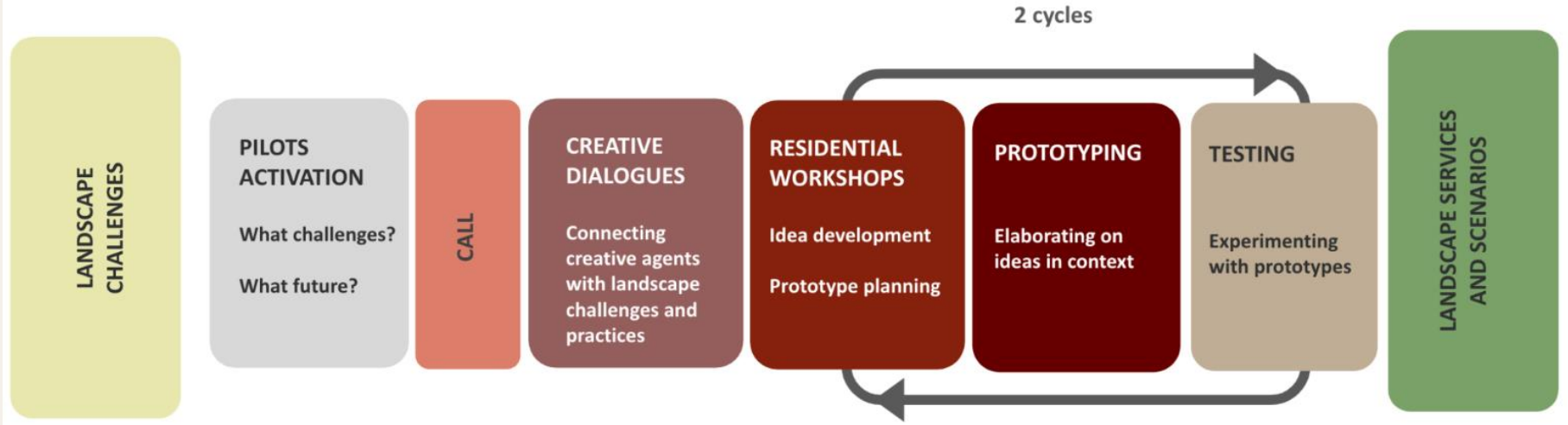
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PALIMPSEST Concept in use



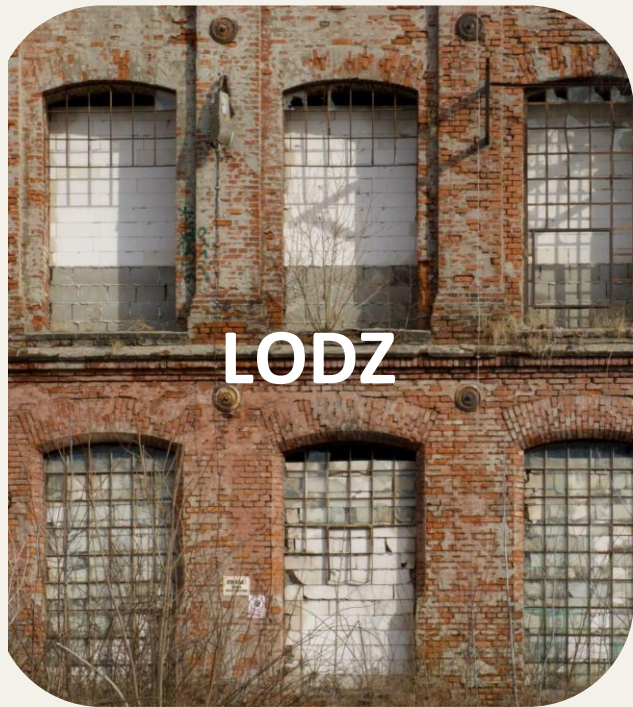
The Co-creation process (T1.4)

Co-Creation as a methodological guide





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LODZ



MILANO



**JEREZ de la
FRONTERA**



PALIMPSEST in Milano

Local Team

ERSAF is a public technical body of the Lombardy Region that provides technical support for agricultural and forestry services, as well as technical support for projects related to strategic territorial planning of river basins, climate change and water resources.

ERSAF is involved, together with RL, in water protection and water use activities and is the scientific-technical coordinator of the **River Contracts**, a powerful tool for strategic planning, governance and management, subscribed and supported by multiple stakeholders (such as municipal authorities, park authorities, management authorities, associations) who have the same ambitious aim of co-creating harmonised actions for the river basin. The Lambro River Contract is one of them.

It is also the leader of a new approach developed with the **ReLambro project**, linked to the rediscovery of the river's ecological nature in the metropolitan area and its relationship with the landscape and social liveability.

IL LAMBRO RESTITUITO ALLA CITTÀ.

Qualità delle
acque, reti
ecologiche
e un grande
Parco Est
tra Monza
e Melegnano

Il Lambro attraversa la grande Milano: di 130 km, questo fiume è stato sorgenti a Pirovano nel Po, 30 km scendono in una valle isolata tra i due, attraversa i quartieri della città.

Il Lambro è alto, pastoso, intorbidito, poco naturale, sequenza di Luoghi Inquinati. Le acque del Lambro sfiorano le Cascate di Monza, le aree Falck, i Lodi di Lambro, Ferraresi, e Morisù, Ponte Lambro e Viala Rossa.

Vorremmo che il Lambro Milanese diventasse:

- **Un ecosistema urbano**, dalle reti ecologiche efficienti, infrastruttura ambientale che di per sé offre infrastrutture e opportunità interne come strade e ferrovie, genera vite e il funzionamento dello città rispondendo in relazione ai cittadini.
- **Un centro coordinato di servizi** (Viale Melegnano, attraverso la grande Milano, conosciuta da una sfilata di 2000 negozi, campi coltivati, mercati da bio, skate e Park, cinema) che ignora barriere di un percorso ciclabile e pedonale senza interruzioni.
- **Un parco urbano** per la città, che si affaccia sul fiume e non gli venga le spalle, che ricostruisce i propri spazi elaborati nel secondo progetto di riqualificazione, che amplifica il ciclo delle acque urbane e ne utilizza qualità alle acque del fiume.

IL PROGETTO

Perfondo di questo volume, cittadini, associazioni e istituzioni hanno intrapreso un percorso di lavoro per studiare le necessità della rete ecologica del Lambro Milanese coinvolgendo il Piano del Contratto "di Lambro" e gli accordi con i comitati cittadini, enti locali, associazioni e comitati di cittadini, con la partecipazione di Comune di Milano, Parco Museo Valle Lambro, Città di Mantovano di Milano, Legambiente, il contratto di fiume del Po e della valle del Po.

Di obiettivi sono ricostruite la comunità del fiume, dell'ambiente il territorio generale, la qualità la specie del fiume, l'ambiente gli elementi di biodiversità e la qualità del territorio adattando agli obiettivi di qualità, con un forte coinvolgimento attivo di enti, associazioni cittadini.

Il progetto prevede e si è rivolto nelle nuove iniziative di Regione Lombardia nell'ambito del Contratto di Fiume Lambro Suburbano.

- ERSAF team:**
- Dario Kian
 - Daniela Masotti
 - Daniele Drago
 - Francesca Squadrelli
 - Edoardo Tomaselli

Local Team

KARAKORUM is a cultural and creative enterprise that transforms culture into a strategic element for sustainable development. Artists become protagonists of transition processes and valuable interlocutors for all sectors and areas of value production at a social, environmental, and economic level.

KARAKORUM operates at regional and national levels but chose to take root in Varese, a small town on the Swiss border, where, alongside its work in artistic, immersive and participatory production, it carries out a cultural-based urban regeneration project.

From 2018, it cooperates with the Politecnico di Milano in experimental projects researching creative approaches to the challenge of sustainable local development.

The Karakorum team:

- Stefano Beghi (curator)
- Chiara Boscaro (artistic team member)



Lambro river and the city

The Lambro River is one of Milan's main rivers, flowing on the eastern side of the metropolitan area, **the only one that remains uncovered through its course.**

Known as one of the most polluted rivers in Lombardy, and probably in Italy, after a long history of beauty and opportunity as a **resource for human activities** and industries, it is going through a difficult period in which it seems to be **forgotten by citizens and local authorities**, except when odour or weather phenomena bring it to negative attention.

This river - and its beauty - is given by its numerous bends, a sinuous movement that still today emphasises its flow, giving rise to an uninterrupted series of industrial settlements, villages and agricultural settlements.

Practices around the river, however, have profoundly changed it and altered the landscape through which it flows.

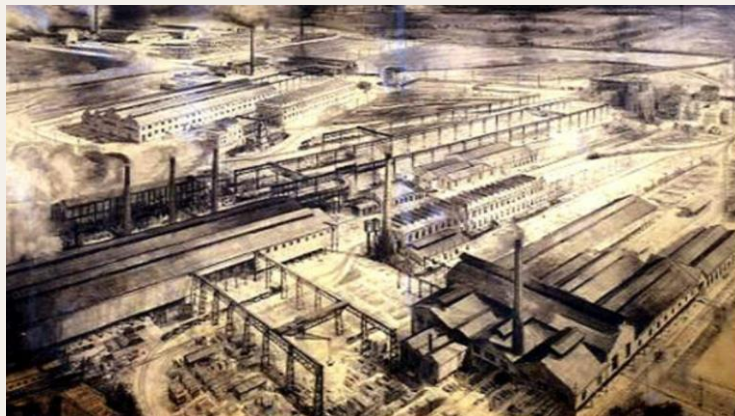


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Lambro river and the east periphery



Est of Milan is **one of the most compromised areas of the Metropolitan city**: environmental issues coexist due to the presence of technological systems, demolitions, landfills, road infrastructures abandoned industrial settlements, free areas to be redeveloped but also **full of history**, with its former steel furnaces, prestigious villas, and the agricultural areas around Cascina Gobba and Rubattino, including ancient farmhouses, from San Gregorio to Biblioteca.



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The history of an area and landscape around the river has been gradually changed by the relationship between man and water, first with **the river as a water resource**, for **navigation** and **fishing**, then with **agriculture** near the city, with the era of **industries** and settlements and **working-class tensions**, and finally when the river was no longer needed, with the **abandonment and degradation** of its territory and those who live there.



Lambro river and its waters

"We didn't imagine that one day -and one day was overnight- it might disappear because it was too beautiful, too perfect."

"...that big foam on the river, like magic, even iridescent, it was a new, curious, sometimes colourful thing."

look at this video to get a clue...!

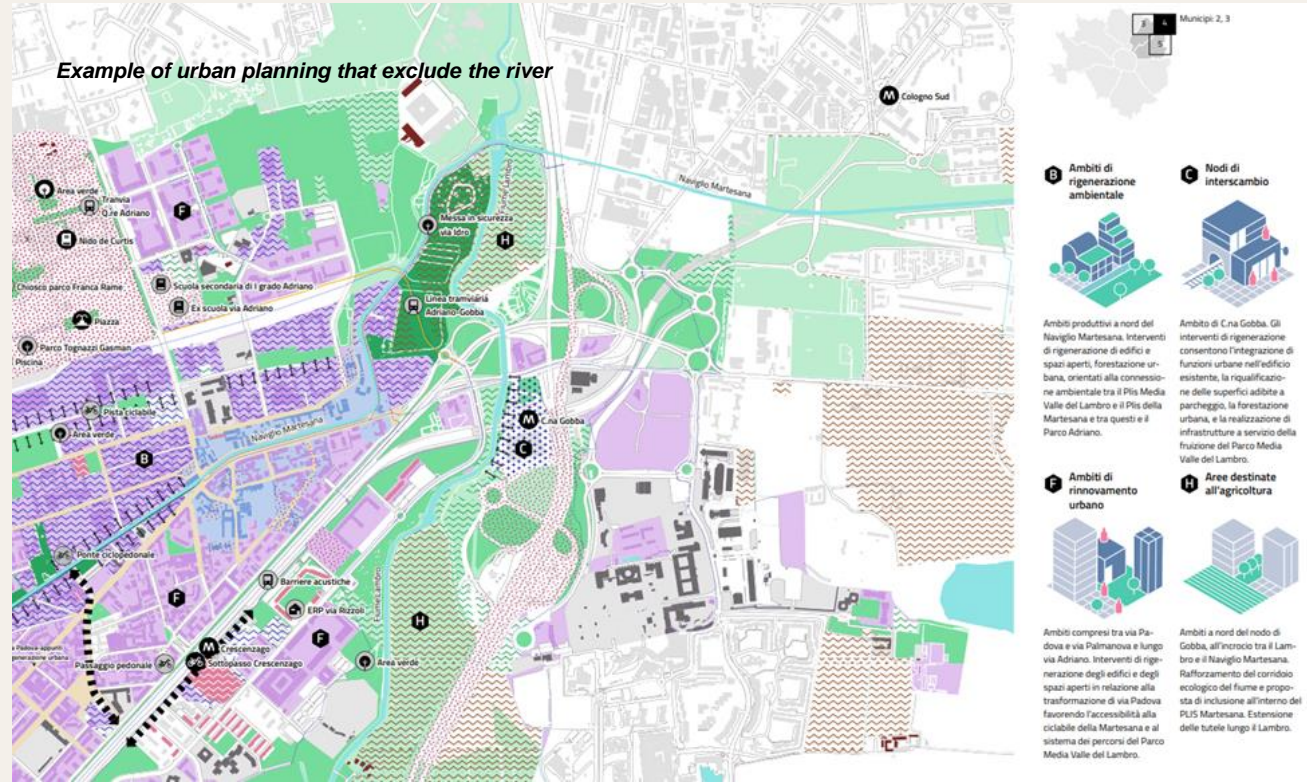
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHukYIUi0n0>



Landscape planning

Institutional behaviour towards new redevelopment and urban plans often forgets to include the river in the planning itself.

The river is in the plans but not in the policies, the river's territory is only made up of its constituent elements but has no leading role.



Agricultural practices

In the river area, there are still some scattered agricultural practices, such as spontaneous (unauthorized) urban gardens.



Hut of an unauthorized vegetable gardens



Flood of the river affecting unauthorized vegetable gardens

Practices of river fruition



Paths and biking



Event *Pedalambro*

Tension - social marginality



Unauthorized shelter



Hut of an unauthorized vegetable gardens



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The challenge



Re-creating a river centrality

How to reconnect the Lambro River with the city? How to restore its role in the production of sustainable landscapes? And how this reconnection can drive the relation of the Milanese with its waters?

In Milan there is **no imaginary landscape linked to the river**: Rome has the Tevere, Florence the Arno, Paris the Seine, Milan has three rivers, two hidden and the only one Lambro present is neglected...

Expansions, retractions, and interactions between the Milanese waters and the Lambro River landscape: remade and rediscover it?

... reconnecting with the invisible

The **Lambro** River is often invisible, a **space of marginality**: suburbs, stories of abandonment, pollution, environmental waste and people on the margins - who inhabit it (Roma, homeless, etc.) **between the visible and the invisible, how can the river become visible again?**

The river is there when it annoys, stinks, and overflows....

What is the boundary between city and periphery, urban, suburban and natural, accepted, not accepted and on the margins? How can the quality of the Lambro River and its surroundings be improved from a perspective of social inclusion and environmental awareness? **What practices can make invisible waters and people visible again?**

Historically, the Lambro has collected the invisible, the working class, those who carried with them a dream of change and protest (e.g. hippie festival 'naked king'), then the neglected, the drug addicts and then the invisible such as the Roma and the homeless.





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The concept



gethan&myles&palimpsest
acqua lambro



The impossible idea

Taking this maligned and mistreated river and **transforming it into a source of purity and pride**, of hope and life, simply by **making its water drinkable**.

The first step in enacting this transformation is **through changing the way people see and think about the river**.

The heart, worth and joy of art come from its power to connect and **communicate - emotions, images, ideas...** To instigate a profound and lasting change in how the public and local government interact with the river we need to **communicate this impossible idea**.

*“In nature, nothing exists alone”
Rachel Carson*



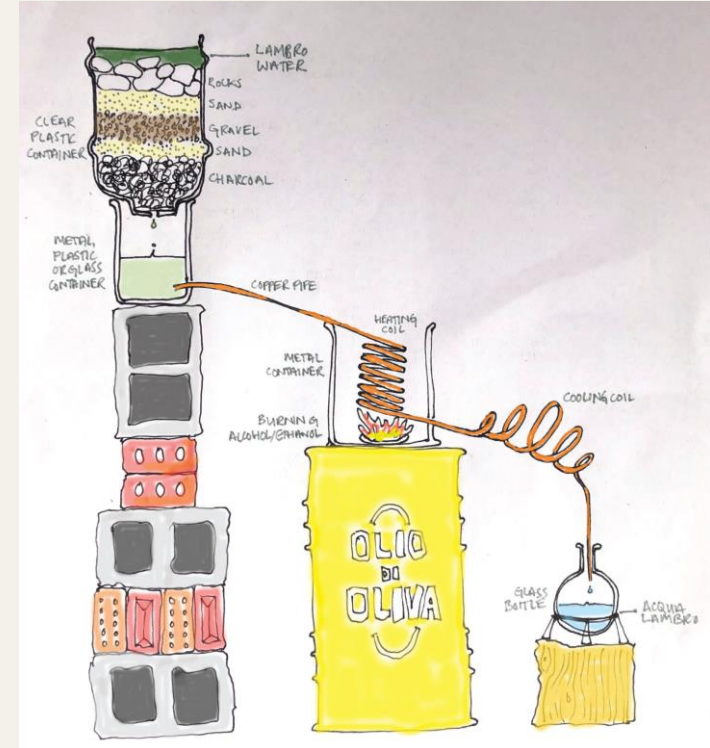
Acqua Lambro mineral water is an idea, not a product

Acqua Lambro water purification DIY device will be constructed from elements salvaged along the route of the river (both waste items including tins, plastic water containers and discarded construction materials, but also sand, rocks and charcoal made from salvaged wood).

In this event the water should become drinkable, however, it is important to stress, **that drinkable water is not essential for the success of the project.**

With the partners' help we would analyse the resulting clear water and indicate to the public via a mineral-water-style label what contaminants have been removed - and what remains.

The illusion of purity is just as interesting as purity itself.



bottles



in popular imagery plastic bottle in water is a **symbol of pollution** while a plastic bottle full of water is a **symbol of cleanliness**

production of limited edition of glass bottles, marked acqua lambro



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The Residential Workshop



“New” agricultural settlement

Cascina Biblioteca's old agricultural settlement since the Roman age remains during the ages in the landscape has a **renewed role**, together social and agricultural.

It combines agricultural practices with education, social inclusion, land management and hospitality, and could be an example for the other farmsteads in this area.

The main goal of the farmers there is to involve people with difficulties/fragile, and to create points of aggregation
The river remains the “great father” of Cascina Biblioteca coop. although is invisible there.

Agriculture here covers also a social role



Rooting

The residential workshop was primarily dedicated to **creating an awareness of the perception of the challenges by trying to enter into the vision of the local ecosystem.**

What we planned was to drop the 'general' challenges and delve into them for this specific area, also through the eyes of those who have been active, familiar with and working on the challenge issues for some time.

This was possible thanks to numerous **site visits, meetings with many players in the area** and moments such as the **rooting spritz** where there were informal exchanges to share points of view.



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Residential Workshop / Outcomes

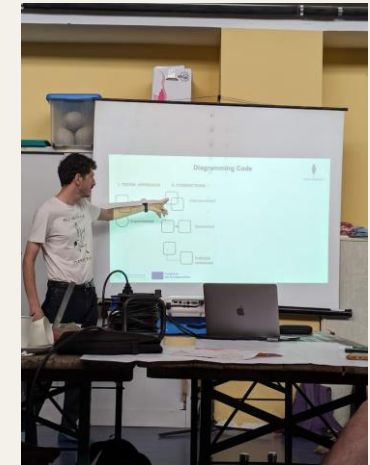


Co-creation in act

Then developed into the project through **flooding coffees** and many moments **to share the scientific approach** of PALIMPSEST research.

During these parts of the week, a very important **co-creation** between the artists and the consortium was activated, also with the **support of highly qualified technicians** who provided elements for the prototyping phase but above all **generated fundamental questions.**

On one hand, it allowed the creative agents to **understand the semantic and technical structuring** of the palimpsest approach and stimulated them to consider this **methodology** in the creative process, changing the approach from active involvement step by step to a co-creation that can activate the local ecosystem in the long term, leaving a **legacy** related to the transformation of approaches to the river.



Understanding practices and landscapes

On the other hand, the creative agents asked the PALIMPSEST partners to **step out of the constant programmed scientific rigour** by **directly and physically experiencing creative opportunities** that gradually arose - in an unplanned manner - precisely thanks to the inspirational and creative power of the artists.



Evolution of the concept



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Moving from **visible/invisible** to **possible/impossible** through the discovery of places and things (water that cannot be seen, animals in Milan, the snake that passes and disappears, ...).

Concept of **care**, we take care of the river but the river also does something for us.

The transition from one **machine** to **purify** the water to several machines, in a path of **community activation**, fair of the impossible, machine standing out in the landscape as a landmark.



Understanding of the ecosystem

The importance of recognising and **sharing values**: what is beautiful? How do we consider a river beautiful?

Drinkable water, but do we need it? Clean for whom? For what?

Questioning ideas and sharing a vision: what is useful to create a legacy? to activate communities?

Identify **key actors** to include in the next work

Farmsteads and abbeys are a concluding part of the previous process, abandonment of the challenge point 3.





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Towards prototyping



Starting prototyping

Considering the **artistic and metaphorical** content of the proposal

- value system to be defined and shared, learn by doing
- intrigue the local ecosystem to act differently 'outside the box
- disruptive idea impact

considering the aspects of **the creation**

- very articulate proposal, to be maintained or reduced in favour of greater care?
- location must be in Milan
- involvement of the local ecosystem of the production of the parts of the work (machine/campaign/bottle)



Practices



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Practices should be about **‘changing the matrix of perception of perfection’**.

The practice is conceptual, the change of how we perceive the river, of the relationship with the river, **of caring for the river, which is not just cleaning it, putting it in order, straightening it, but grasping the beauty of its imperfection**, respecting it by recognising its vehemence where it manifests, accepting it by **acknowledging our responsibilities** where it ‘stinks’ and is unpleasant, freeing it where possible from anthropic constraints to give it the right space.





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What **materials** are in the river?

creation with materials from the river and its territory (in or demolition)

water, wood waste, collection of materials from the river **concrete** and **metaphorical** related to the practice of cleaning the river.



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About common **narratives**

What stories are on the river? How do we decide to act?

dimension of fun

What **choice** do we make for the narrative style that can **activate change**?
Trolley of joy? The basket of crying children?

What do the local ecosystem and palimpsest propose as a **value system** in which to recognise oneself?
Life connected to the collected waste in concrete



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What should this **machine** do to **change the situation** in some way?
do clean water?

machine to build from creative agents or
activate the community to build the
machines? or both?

machine to move along the river?
exposition of machines?

be realistic with the project flow



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glass bottle like those abandoned

to act on the collection of waste around
the river

to represent the 'water bottle - from
waste to element of purity'

with a local glassmaker as an artistic
limited production



To build the inspiration to get involved
towards the river
- **hands-on the river** -

What impression of the landscape through the
water?
and what remains?

Dimension of **caring**

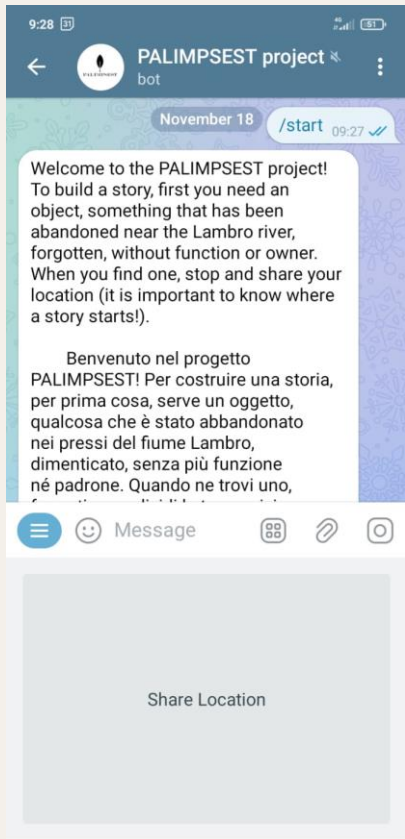
materials in the river not waste but object
related with stories, the river take care of that
stories



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Do you want to help us?





https://t.me/geodeliberation_bot