

Situated Practice

Gardening as a Response to Ownership and Ground in Girona

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Abstract

The ground is both the surface occupied by urban development and a physical media – soil – in which plants grow. Since housing density is a mechanism by which to maximise a site's financial yield, construction covers the real ground. Consequently, the soil is provided to residents in containers on terraces or balconies. However, the properties of natural ground and simulated ground are different, affecting gardening activity and the kind of material and spatial outcomes resulting from it, the synthesis of which is called “the viridic” by the author. Gardening has health benefits for people. Correspondingly, because different soil conditions affect gardening, this benefit's qualities are also inflected by access to and type of soil.

Using Yin's “theory building” case study model, two gardens by a landscape architect in Girona are discussed: one on a terrace in containers; the other on the natural ground in a public reserve nearby. Comparing and contrasting these gardens allows for the consideration of the relationship between soil and gardening technique. In addition, the process of abstraction of the ground implicit in site development may also be considered, as well as the implications of such a process on the way in which residents cultivate their gardens and the limitations of private gardens in contributing to local microclimatic and environmental qualities. The paper concludes by refining the model of the viridic based on soil and how soil mediates the relationship of the viridic to urban development.

Keywords

landscape architecture, gardening, urban soil, urban planning, the viridic

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Introduction

In *Overgrown: practices between landscape architecture and gardening*, I argued for a reorientation of landscape architecture away from *representation* and toward *practices* as a way of engaging with change, a source of great potential for the discipline. Articulating a “tectonic” model for plants that I called “the viridic,” I proposed that gardening practice interacts with plant biology to create a dynamic form language for landscape architecture (Raxworthy, 2018, p. 5). While I aimed to open up landscape design to plants differently, I left the relationship to the city and urbanism unarticulated, begging the question: what is the relationship between the viridic and the city, which is both its context and to which it contributes qualities? The obvious lost link is the ground, which Tomà Berlanda characterises as having a “biological, geological, and metaphorical sense as context for human thought” (Berlanda, 2014, p. 56). The ground is both the surface on which the city is built and simultaneously constitutes the literal material in which plants grow.

The ground is not abstract for the gardener; rather, it is soil, “the source of life... we build on it, and nations rise and fall on their soil,” says Richard TT Foreman (2014, p. 91). Nonetheless, Pollan notes that “soil is a mystery” because it is a “complex biological (and not just chemical) wilderness” (Pollan, 2002, p. 139). However, the soil is under-theorised since, as landscape architect Seth Denizen notes, “soil itself did not enjoy the status of a “thing” until it was empirically produced in the late 19th century... [before which time] it was conceptually identical to rock” (Denizen, 2012, p. 35). The literal, specific ground of the garden is a rich surface since “most of the physical and chemical processes on which gardeners depend occur at surfaces [including] soil particles, plant roots, and compost heaps” (James, 2003, p. 24). However, as cities become denser, many people do not have access to the actual ground, but only to simulations of it in pots or planters and artificial grounds like terraces. Considering soil in the ground and simulations of the ground – such as in artificial planters – shows how different soil conditions affect how one gardens and thereby one’s relationship to the territory. Such a consideration will help me develop the viridic to account for soil and the city.

On the 8th of May 2019, I visited Girona, Catalunya, with Catalan landscape architect Martí Franch Battlori, the director of *EMF Arquitectura del Paisatge*, where he lives and works. As a landscape architect, he has been developing a series of “gardens” using maintenance in Girona’s public spaces. Franch says that he has three gardens: Garden 1, the elevated private terrace of his flat in his apartment block; Garden 2, a public parkland at the end of his street, which he has been using maintenance to open up and; Garden 3, the subject of a larger gardening project with the municipality called “Girona’s Shores.” Franch (2018) and Ehrmann (2019) have discussed Garden 3 extensively, so this paper will focus on the relationship between Garden 1 & Garden 2, which it will compare and contrast. Garden 1 is private and uses planters, and therefore is artificial, while Garden 2 is public and embedded in the ground. Both gardens use gardening and maintenance practices to articulate and sustain them. Still, such practices differ for each because of the nature of their respective soil environments, which are, in turn, affected by differences in ownership.

The benefits of gardening for health are widely recognised (Soga, Gaston, & Yamaura, 2017). By discussing these two gardens, I aim to show that access to actual ground changes what the garden is and the nature of gardening because, as I argued in *Overgrown*, the garden as a type and gardening activity are inherently related. Different ownership models affect residents’ ability to access soil and dictate the *nature of that relationship* to soil, land tenure delimiting gardening practice, and resultant spatial outcomes created by plants. Gardening is a diverse activity in which different types of gardens create different types of gardening. While health studies talk about gardening in a general way, I would argue that different gardening activity types provide qualities to gardening’s available quantitative health values.

My site observations of both gardens and two interviews with Franch about the gardening activities he undertakes for each garden provide the evidence for the cases and additional photographs and site measurements are provided by Franch. In an initial interview, I determined the context and history of Franch's development and use of both gardens. Drawing on my observations and professional experience, I inferred implementation and gardening actions for each, which I then fact-checked in a second interview. In this paper, I adopt Robert Yin's case study model called "Argument Building," in which several cases are organised sequentially to build an argument where each case "has a [particular] purpose within the overall scope of the inquiry" (Groat, 2002, p. 347). Franch's two gardens show two polar opposite types of garden cases, which I discuss in the following order: Garden 1 in a planter on a terrace, and Garden 2 on the real ground - which amply describe two situations that many urban dwellers - and gardeners - face living in the contemporary city. After examining both gardens, I explore two aspects in the "Discussion": how changes in soil situation change the type of gardening that residents can undertake, and, in turn, the material and spatial outcomes that they can achieve in the place where they live, and; how site development instruments abstract ground for planning purposes but in the process lose the real capabilities of land. The latter is a dangerous proposition, since I argue that, rather than being trivial, gardening and soil in gardens on the natural ground are fundamental to achieving positive environmental and microclimatic outcomes for cities. Finally, in conclusion, I return to the viridic look at how this emphasis of soil and its link to the city modifies and enhances my previous definition of it.

Case Study: Two Gardens in Girona



FIGURE 1 Location map of the area Barri de les Pedreres, Girona near the Torre del General Peralta (a) where Garden 1 (b) and Garden 2 (c) are located (Image by Author).

Franch's gardens are located (Fig. 1) in the *Barri de les Pedreres*, or the "Quarries Quarter" of Girona, and can be seen from the tourist "stone route" along the historic wall of Girona. Looking east from the *Torre del General Peralta* (the "Tower of General Peralta"), one can gain a "panoramic view of the... rock formations of... the many quarries in the area, from where the material for the construction of the buildings in the historic center of the city" (Natura Local, n.d.). Topographically, the quarrying process is visible on the south side of the valley; a neighbour's property nestled below a cliff that was a quarry face is visible from Marti's terrace (Garden 1). Garden 2 is located 100 metres east of Franch's apartment block, at the base of the valley in a public reserve that Franch suggests was levelled and built using excavated quarry material.

Garden 1: Terrace



FIGURE 2 Marti Franch's terrace: Garden 1 (Image by Marti Franch).

Looking at the gardens of landscape architects is always an interesting thing to do, made even more interesting because of the size limitations of Franch's little terrace, requiring one to invent a language to talk about it: do planters constitute a garden?

Franch's apartment block is on *Passeig General Peralta*. This street continues from the gate adjacent to the tower of the same name, heading east up toward Garden 2, past a series of townhouses. Turning south, up the side of the valley, the street turns back up, and Franch's apartment block is on the first kink in the road. On the top floor of a two-storey block, Franch's apartment has windows on the north overlooking the city wall and across the townhouses' roofs below. The terrace faces south, its views hemmed in by an adjacent block below the hill, with glimpses up the valley toward the east, of remnant quarry faces.

The terrace (Fig. 2) is 13.3 sqm in size and is long & thin – approximately 2m wide by 6m long – its surface timber decking. The "garden" of Garden 1 is entirely in containers, primarily comprising cement planter boxes atop the apartment wall on its hot south side, and another on the deck with bamboo to screen the entry to the east, with the remaining assorted pots. The planter is 300mm deep and 300mm wide with a 30mm rim. After having used the containers for some time, Franch noticed that root development on the south side of

the box was limited during plant replacement. Thinking this was due to heat, he installed insulation material inside the planter on the south side, made of neoprene material or similar, like a camping thermal mat to encourage growth, or rather, to reduce discouragement.



FIGURE 3 Franch's terrace planter box, and its constituent soil profile (Image by M. Franch).

The limited depth of the containerised soil profile means that drainage is a crucial factor. The container sits on plastic sheeting on the wall that directs water onto the deck from holes in the planter base. Franch acknowledges this solution arose because of friction with the neighbours concerning the previous path of the water. Inside the planter (Fig. 3), there are three layers of material geared toward providing a free-draining soil medium: a base layer of large volcanic scoria gravel, a layer of sand above it, and the planting soil on the top. The planting soil is a standard nursery container mix. Franch added some local soil with clay to improve the water holding capacity and occasionally added gel balls to avoid over-drying due to the heat from the southerly sun. Like all planters, the soil mix assembly in the container mimics natural soil.

Franch describes his terrace activity as “impulsive gardening” compared to his usual way of working: design. Consequently, the planter plants are diverse, mostly non-native, and he uses the planter to test potential plants for use in his professional projects. Approximately 40-50% of the plants are perennial, with grasses forming the planter’s foundation, and other species including *Diosma*, *Dietes*, *Muhlenbeckia*, and *Hedera* also present. Franch estimates that he replaces 10% of the plants each year. Franch says that most of the maintenance he undertakes in Garden 1 is replacing or cleaning the sprayers for the automatic irrigation system and occasional fertilisation with slow-release pellets.

The viridic is a language of landscape architectural form tied to plants. Branches and leaves of plants are inherently formal, and gardening techniques, like pruning, manipulate them to shape space. Plants grow in the soil, forming reticulate root arrangements that support plant architecture. At a basic level, soil affects and limits the formal growth of plants. Beyond the raw binary of growing/not-growing, there are numerous

other ways that soil properties affect plant growth, particularly if we take a material view that recognises that plant form is material. Chemical properties of the soil affect both the rate and type of growth and colour through flowers. Degrees of compaction and the soil profile's nature affect root development and extent, while also influencing plant architecture. With the limited capacity of the planters on Franch's terrace, the reduced width and depth would affect the "root to shoot ratio" and prohibit the growth of larger shrubs or woody plants (to some degree) and Franch specifically selected grasses based on the capabilities of the container. In this way, the nature – and shape – of the soil environment contribute to a formal and spatial plant outcome.

Garden 2: Reserve

Franch's Garden 3, the innovative "Girona's Shores" (2014), which used gardening/maintenance techniques to create spaces in public parkland, has been widely celebrated, winning the Landzine International Landscape Award in the Infrastructure Category in 2020, for example (Landzine Media LLC, 2020). However, Franch first began testing these ideas in a site at the bottom of the valley in which he lives, at the end of his street, in an area of undesigned or informal public parkland, which he calls "Garden 2", where he "played at being Gilles Clément." Clément is a pioneering French landscape architect who utilised mowing as a management and space-shaping tool in his "Garden[s] of Movement" notably at Parc André Citroën (1992) in Paris where "gardeners... followed [the park's] development and immediately participated in its maintenance even before [its] opening to the public" (Clément, 2007, p. 83). Topographically, this valley comprises a series of approximately ten terraces that climb toward the ridge above. Franch believes that quarrying created these terraces by filling areas with spoil excavated from the south side of the valley, including directly behind his apartment block. The terraces are levelled by beautifully crafted retaining walls made of small pieces of leftover limestone from the quarry. However, the absence of rock in the terrace soil suggests to Franch that quarrying did not take place in the base of the valley, the ground being a combination of spoil and deposition from erosion above. The lowest terrace had been appropriated by a man for his house when Martí first visited, planted with an orchard, but was derelict and filled with rubbish. The one above was overgrown and inaccessible, with informal footpaths making their way through gaps in the vegetation. Franch describes the landscape at this time as "a kind of prairie with large shrubs poking out from it."



FIGURE 4 Franch clearing the terrace of Garden 2 (Image by M. Franch).

This type of leftover space is characteristic of the *Landscape Metropolis*, a piece of ambiguous ground that corresponds precisely to Clément's notion of "*du Tiers paysage*" ("Third Landscape") since it is: "*délaissé*," neglected or abandoned after the termination of exploitative land use; a "*réserve*," a site of difficult access and management and; is a landscape of municipal designation rather than specific purpose. (Clément, 2004, p. 9) It is its "left-over-ness" that allowed Franch to "appropriate" it, a term coined by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre would probably prefer the term *detournement* or *diversion*, however, where "an existing space may outlive its original purpose and the *raison d'être* which determines its forms, functions, and structures; it may thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 167). This definition fits with Clément's and indeed, it is Lefebvre's "forms" – the flattish areas of the terrace – that make it ripe or "susceptible" for this diversion.

While Franch calls his terrace, Garden 1, his "own" garden, its small size and the limitation of its containers left him wanting to undertake "spatial" gardening. This "Third Landscape" seemed an ideal location. He would walk there regularly with his young children, who would disappear off paths in the vegetation that were too tight for adults to follow them, and which they named things like the "Elf Path." Franch first began pruning trees, both for access and views, and then bought a strimmer machine, and first used a brush-cutter metal blade to start cutting the shrubs down – mostly *Rosa* and *Prunus* – to ground level (Fig. 4). This stage could be called "surface control", aimed at making the surface uniform and revealing the flat topography – and walls – of the terrace. Over the following few years, Franch used a strimmer attachment to cut the grass and create a relatively uniform surface. Eventually, the council took over and mowed the area three times a year using a tractor with a tough cutting attachment, as part of Franch's Girona's Shores project in the broad areas of "Third Landscape" on the eastern side of Girona, where Franch lives. Labyrinth and "wi-fi" patterns have been cut in by the council on the terraces above, which use similar gardening techniques to those he uses, but which are too obvious in their pattern for Franch. Marti pulled back from maintaining this landscape so intensively but continued pruning trees on his walks, though he notes that he feels shy pruning in front of others who use the space, not wanting other residents to think that he is trying to "own" the site. For Franch, this activity constitutes a relationship with landscape and is not about owning it through these acts – a fact about which he is adamant. He notes that further up the valley, others have started to use planting and other measures to create private interiors within the public space, mostly for productive gardens. At the back (west) end of the terrace, Franch and a neighbouring friend with kids created a covered arbour that they cut out of the vegetation. This area, called the "Yurta" (or yurt), comprised a 6mm steel frame that crossed from one side of the path to the other, anchored into the ground, running along the length of the track (Fig. 5). This structure aimed to shade the space and allow for picnics and seating below it when it is hot. For this structure, Franch trained existing plants that were naturally growing adjacent to the path such as *Clematis vitalba*, *Prunus spinosa*, *Rhamnus alaternus*, *Crataegus monogyna* *Ulmus minor*.

Discussion

The case studies of Franch's two gardens differ in obvious ways: one is on a terrace in a container and the other on the real ground; one is private, the other public; plants in one are planted while in the other are spontaneous; one is wholly artificial and the other mostly natural and; much energy is required to maintain the bare status quo in one while the other involves labour to keep it under control. In this section, I will discuss the differences between these two gardens to explore the relationship between gardening and soil, and then how issues of land tenure affect the nature of the soil environment, which in turn affect the character of the gardening activity.



FIGURE 5 Marti Franch in Garden 2 from my visit in 2019 with its “Yurta” that he and a neighbour erected, training spontaneous vegetation over it (Image by Author, 2019).

Soil & Gardening

Landscape architects and designers primarily understand the garden as something planned, a spatial or material phenomenon. “A humanly planned garden comes into being in and through time,” Roberto Pogue Harrison argues in *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*, because plants change as they grow to form its space (Harrison, 2008, p. 7). I argued in *Overgrown* that the garden is defined as much by the act of gardening as it is by its space, where this activity takes place. Consequently, that “the garden [as a space] and [the act of] gardening are synonymous” (Raxworthy, 2018, p. 25) was a rationale for me to develop the term *viridic*, a form language for plants tied to growth and maintenance, which must necessarily be about soil.

The earth is not mute but active in growth, since plants are grounded and nourished by the soil. Correspondingly, by fostering soil, growth is also encouraged, making soil a crucial part of the *viridic*. While working with richer soils than those in Catalunya, Henk Gerritsen proposed a model of gardening focused on the soil. For example, in his model, “plants would grow slowly and relatively small,” which would also affect competing plants or weeds that would otherwise overgrow them in rich soil. (Gerritsen, 2008, p. 88) Faced with the succession cycle, Gerritsen suggests “the most important trick to keep maintenance to a minimum is to limit fertility,” which, for naturally fertile soil, means to “*never* add fertilizer, remove leaves and stems of dead plants... [and to] use compost sparingly” (Gerritsen, 2008, p. 88). Henk Gerritsen argues for working with the *minimum* conditions that a plant needs rather than the maximum, as we might expect since he uses soil fertility to regulate growth. Less growth equals less maintenance.

The reserve at the end of the street – Garden 2 – corresponds to Gerritsen’s situation. The soil has characteristics that encourage the growth of spontaneous vegetation. On the real ground, the soil does most of the gardening work, only adjusted, topped up, or restricted, as Gerritsen suggests, to suit desired spatial outcomes. Gerritsen’s proposition, however, is predicated on the competition between planted ornamental plants and spontaneous vegetation. In Garden 2, Franch’s gardening acts operate by shaping existing growth for spatial effects, such as tree pruning, removing vegetation, cutting down shrubs, and training plants over frames, in the “Yurta.”

In contrast, Garden 1 – on the terrace – with its artificial soil profile, is entirely different. Pots and other plant containers are simulations of the ground. This simulation must have enough integrity to fool plants into believing that they are at home and actually in their natural setting. While gardening is always an act concerned primarily with cultivating soil to encourage plant growth, in containers, the design, arrangement, and maintenance of the soil profile is a simulation of – and a proxy for – extensive, large-scale, and dynamic connections naturally present in the soil biome. The natural ground has what I would call a “buffer,” a foundation of soil-structure that can hold water and nutrients that implicitly provide a metaphorical “leg-up” that the container would have to simulate to achieve the same starting position. Gardening in Garden 1 comprises an act of simulating a natural soil, which is like “faking” ground, more than optimising plant potential as, for example, it does in Garden 2.

Ground and land tenure

The soil is a continuum that has numerous roles and is the literal foundation for everything: for building and food, as growing media. As a material, the soil has a range of properties that affect multiple aspects of landscape architecture, gardening, and building design and practice, many of which overlap. One example of such overlap is how the properties of a given soil as a foundation and a growing medium are affected by soil structure. Sand is well-draining, keeping a soil aerated, while at the same time having compressive strength, making it a better foundation, for instance. For my argument, this overlap provides a bridge between the discourse of gardening and that of site development.

The ground’s bearing capacity is pertinent since the ground must be the “foundation... for building elements penetrating the terrain to reach a stable layer on which to transmit vertical loads” (Berlanda, 2014, p. 60). Here we have a link to the physicality of the site and its geology. Treating the floors of a building as manifestations or abstractions of ground recalls Stan Allen’s characterisation of a building as a kind of accelerated geology in his book *Landform Building*. In his essay in the volume “Matter of Surface,” Allen suggests that “landform building... blurs the boundaries between landscape and architecture, treating the building itself as a fragment of the constructed ground” (Allen, 2011, p. 364). For Allen, this normalisation is problematic because “constructing the ground [is] negotiating two equally difficult realms... [because] the ground wants to be slow, weighty and deep on the one hand [and] level and consistent on the other” (Allen, 2011, p. 365).

Sites are developed based on their “capability” for building, a process that makes ground abstract. A form of this abstraction is when the ground is simply facilitating other uses. *Floor Area Ratio or FAR* maximises the ground’s financial return capacity by allowing for multi-storey development as part of planning controls for density and land use. Platt describes FAR as “specify[ing] the maximum floor area for a structure as a multiple of the site area [so that, for example] a FAR of 10 allows a ten-story building to cover an entire building site or allows a 20 story building on half the site” (Platt, 2014, p. 96). Calculated as a ratio compared to the area of the site, FAR is a duplication of the ground, a process that Simon Unwin calls “stratification,” using a geological analogy, which thus suggests geology (Unwin, 2009, p. 197).

Although FAR is, in essence, an amplification of the ground – an exponential multiplication of its surface area – floors lack the capabilities of the earth in terms of soil and growing media. In the last 20 years, “greening” initiatives have focused on developing technologies to allow plants to grow on architecture in various ways (Dunnett & Kingsbury, 2004) & (Blanc, 2008), and Garden 1 is an example of this. While artificial greening is now an accepted and successful technology, there are differences between the soil in the ground and soil in a planter. As Pollan reminds us, “we can nourish but not, as the scientist’s black-and-white picture of it would have us think, simulate, soil” (Pollan, 2002, p. 139) because individual dynamic natural relationships are not present in planters. These include broad and deep connections to soil water

and organisms, the self-replenishing systems of organic matter, and the ability of plants to modify their environment, as is the case for Garden 2.

The linked properties of the site, as topography and as soil, become geotechnical and dependent on financial constraints. Once these languages are connected, we recognise that those same geotechnical descriptions are also descriptions of growing media. Those properties are still lost when a building covers a site - an obvious point that is seldom considered. Planning policy recognises agricultural land as valuable based on soil productivity, and correspondingly sprawl is seen as a threat to food security. When planning codes limit site-coverage, they do not generally do so for the sake of gardening, but to minimise effects on the amenity of adjacent dwellings. That gardens and gardening might be necessary would seem to be a recognition of frivolity. Yet, as we see from Franch's experience, the urge to undertake gardening can be profound, yet limited by site development. Gardens embedded in the ground contribute to ecological systems and also contribute to climate change mitigation, in a way that accumulates to have a resulting significant effect at scale. When we recognise that gardens are sustained by gardening - and provide benefits to gardeners - we also realise that treating gardens seriously and giving them real land is vital ecologically, as well as being a planning issue.

Conclusion

Beyond being merely a receptacle for plants, the soil is an active part of plants' growth, and gardeners manipulate it as part of their suite of gardening techniques used to precipitate growth. As such, any definition of the category that I propose of the viridic must necessarily consider the soil's actions as part of it. Since I tend to focus on pruning in *Overgrown*, this paper contributes to my revision of that category.

In my formulation of the viridic, I extended Gottfried Semper's criteria, which focusses on the nature of the material, calibrated to the tools, and the techniques used to manipulate it. I propose that it is growth itself that is the material for the viridic (Raxworthy, 2018, p. 134). Correspondingly, while I focused on pruning actions in *Overgrown*, an obvious revision to the viridic is to incorporate chemistry as a critical component. The raw material for growth is photosynthesis, so carbon dioxide is an essential chemical component in the air that is implicit in any definition of the viridic. For most of the others, the soil is a vital source of chemicals that, as part of growth, must also, therefore, be part of the viridic. While the most apparent soil-borne chemical that is also implicit to growth is water, there is a whole range of other soil-borne macro and micro-nutrients that drive growth. These affect growth in both quantitative - with growth treated as a mass of biological material - and qualitative ways - where colour and form of such growth gains particular visual and formal qualities. The viridic is a dynamic view of form, so plant morphology is always tied to plant physiology, of which soil is a vital part.

The viridic was always a formal category, and in my discussion of the planter in Garden 1, I referred to the way in which the container's size also affected the plant. It does this by limiting root growth and, thereby, plant extent, a crucial factor in contributing to numerous positive environmental outcomes associated with plants. For example, smaller plants sequester less carbon than large ones, showing that restriction on root size is also a restriction on the volume of woody plant material. For my existing definition of the viridic, this woody material was the focus of many of the formal outcomes discussed in *Overgrown*. Reductions in soil volume for trees on concrete slabs in suspended landscapes demonstrate the soil depth's pruning effect on plant growth. Admittedly, this makes the soil a subtle participant in the viridic but a participant nonetheless. Speculatively, one could imagine a project in which soil depth and chemistry were factors for designing plant form, indirectly. If one wishes to have large trees that can have significant urban effects, as I have argued,

the land tenure and urban typological context of site development substantially impact the soil in terms of what can grow and hint at a relationship between the viridic and the urban.

A garden is a kind of collaboration, and the viridic always included the gardener and their actions as shapers, where they foster plant performance for their aims. That fostering has numerous positive environmental consequences that include carbon sequestration, reduction in evaporation from soil and other surfaces, increases in soil water-holding capacity, soil fertility improvements, and habitat for a whole range of other organisms. But to perform the majority of those positive environmental benefits, real soil in the ground is required. The availability of earth to garden on the soil is a planning issue because – aggregated across a city – domestic gardens form a significant ecological reservoir that is under threat from high density “good practice” of urban design.

Consequently, it is also essential to appreciate, as I conclude, that – as Franch told me – it was the limitation of his terrace (Garden 1) that made him move to the reserve (Garden 2). To understand the conundrum of being an urban dweller, these have to be seen together: that a garden is more than just a space for plants, but also an emergent – and serendipitous – opportunity to engage with growth by gardening. It is a custodial act. Limiting access to soil on the ground is a fundamental limitation to this kind of activity, and – as we have discovered during Covid 19 – access to the processes of nature and engagement with it by, for example, gardening, is a significant inhibition of quality of life. Future development typologies must consider this when they abstract the ground and work at all costs to keep it present and active for people living together densely.

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