



THE GARDEN CARETAKER  
RECONCILING CITIES WITH NATURE  
AT FORENE BYER MED NATUREN  
HAVEV/ERTEN





# Life enables life

We hereby introduce *The Garden Caretaker* as a new character in society - an artist, a neighbour, a gardener, a host with soil under their fingernails.

The Garden Caretaker stimulates habitability for many different species through art. A hybrid character, who invites citizens into aesthetic encounters with place, microbes, flora, fauna and the urban landscapes. A character who invites you to stop, listen and be present enough to settle down and experience an active nature. A nature in which humans' lives are encapsulated and on which humans are profoundly dependent.

The Garden Caretaker does not regard nature in the city as invasive and believes that human beings can be healers and stimulators of nature. The Garden Caretaker says: Human beings are nature. Our creations can be natural artefacts and nature has agency.<sup>1</sup> *Gaia is an event!* sings the Garden Caretaker, inspired by the French philosopher Bruno Latour. Living inside Gaia is a dynamic condition. An event for both human beings and for all the other species we cohabit with. To live is not merely something that can be fixed, it is not static nor frozen. It unfolds from one moment to the next. We must participate in this event as people who do not only produce and consume, but as Garden Caretakers we invite participation and attentive investigation of the landscapes, the city, art, materials, our neighbourhoods - as part of the interwoven dance of spe-





cies.<sup>2</sup> The Garden Caretaker explores how art can stimulate a greening of our inner landscapes and thus strengthen our affiliation with the outer landscapes. Because inhabiting is existential. Both for beavers, pygmy bats and humans. Habitats and architecture are a means to an existential foothold<sup>3</sup> - cities, ponds, streams and buildings. In the same way that art reflects the meaning of human existence, architecture creates a framework for it. Previously, our existential questions were often about finding meaning to our unique human life, but it is no longer about such navel-gazing and looking inwards. Now meaning can be found in the awareness of our envelopment with myriads of species and an active enabling of the many other life forms that allow us to have a life<sup>4</sup>.

Our existential investigation is thus radically transformed, and the Garden Caretaker knows this and asks: *Which lives enable our lives, and how do we enable theirs?* Art and architecture must rewrite the existential investigation and unfold the expressions that arise through the awareness of an envelopment in countless other life forms. The Garden Caretaker points towards the multi-species. A city, a neighborhood, town planning, design, landscape design that stimulates belonging across life forms and strengthens habitability for many species!<sup>5</sup>

Who is the Garden Caretaker in your landscape, you could ask. And if you are the Garden Caretaker, how do you enable life?

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# The Garden Caretaker's Manifesto

# Stedets Væsen / Being of Place





# Garden

On a symbolic level, the garden is our original home, a *hortus conclusus*. The garden can be said to be an architectural composition of earth – a material metaphor for our relationship with the natural world. The way hands of people have cut, trimmed, pruned these green patches – these lush shapes, forms, arrangements, they tell us something about ourselves. They can tell stories of control and separation, or they can tell stories of nurture and care. There is an estrangement between humans and nature, which today unfolds as a crisis of belonging. Many people do not know the places they live, the species they share communities with.



# Caretaker

We imagine the garden as a symbol for an interrogation of other ways to engage with and care for the natural landscapes of this planet. If the garden is a microcosm of our larger world, then it is also, the perfect playground to explore new stories and new human characters for us to embody. Stories of wilderness, new relations, kinships, materialisms - reconciling humans with nature. The private garden, the city park, the green patch outside your office, they all hold a revolutionary potential for an emergence of biodiversity, cared for by humans, as we change our idea of what we call a beautiful garden.



# Europe is changing

Tear down. Build new.

This is often how change takes place when countless old buildings and city areas in Europe are renovated, maintained or transformed. But with our growing awareness of the climate and biodiversity crises, new perspectives have gained ground, and a showdown with “business as usual” is underway.

If Europe is to move towards a greener and more sustainable future, our cities and societies will need to be made circular. We need to get accustomed to new types of buildings, recyclable materials and the provision of space for wild areas in future city developments - not despite beauty, but as a part of it.

This transformation requires courage and openness from those who live, develop and build the Europe of the future. The EU initiative, New European Bauhaus

connects beauty and irresistibility with the green transition and this leads in turn to an investigation of how to disrupt a silo mentality, opening up the possibilities of what can happen if artists, engineers, scientists, architects and town planners, ask questions and find answers *together*.

This is inspired by the original Bauhaus school, which gathered craft, architecture and artistic practice in one movement over a century ago.

The aim is for us to dare to believe that the green transition will consist of far more than limitations, but will hold new expressions.

Let us design an irresistible future together.

# New European Bauhaus







# What will happen if we listen to a place before we build?

The Garden Caretaker is a design proposal for landowners based on a regenerative approach to city planning, which entails that construction projects give back to the environments that they are a part of.

The climate and biodiversity crises mean that we will need to change our perspective from a human-centred to an ecology-oriented approach. This will have major impacts on the construction industry and city planning, as we will have to strengthen habitability for a multitude of animals and insects; starting today.

As Latour said - what we don't know, we don't fight for! The role of a Garden Caretaker is thus to stimulate the relationships between life forms, so that others than just ourselves can be catered for.

## BEING OF PLACE

The Garden Caretaker is based on the NXT method of Being of Place (Stedets Væsen). A method used at the old asphalt ground, back when NCC's factory was still in operation.

Being of Place is an interdisciplinary method that registers and maps site-specific qualities on a construction ground before it is developed. The Garden Caretaker is the result of such a registration and was suggested as part of the new construction project that is now emerging on the site of the former asphalt factory.

The idea is that responsiveness to place and the inherent qualities a place holds,

can add value for more actors, both human and other-than-human. Added value in this context should be seen in terms of more than just financial value. It is a long-term value that indicates what will be required of construction in the near future. Requirements that must provide human beings and the environment with the optimum without jeopardising the ability of future multi-species generations to have their needs met as well.

## WITH EU ON THE SIDELINE

In 2020, the European Union entered the picture when NXT was invited to enter into a new partnership to develop a Danish proposal for the EU commission's project New European Bauhaus. In 2022 the partnership project Desire was declared a winner and was one of six lighthouse projects in Europe.

Desire has three Danish demonstration sites of which The Garden Caretaker is one. The test period runs from April 2023 to March 2024. During this period a series of artists will be entering into the role as the Garden Caretaker, where they will test design principles from Desire through arts-based research and citizen involvement.

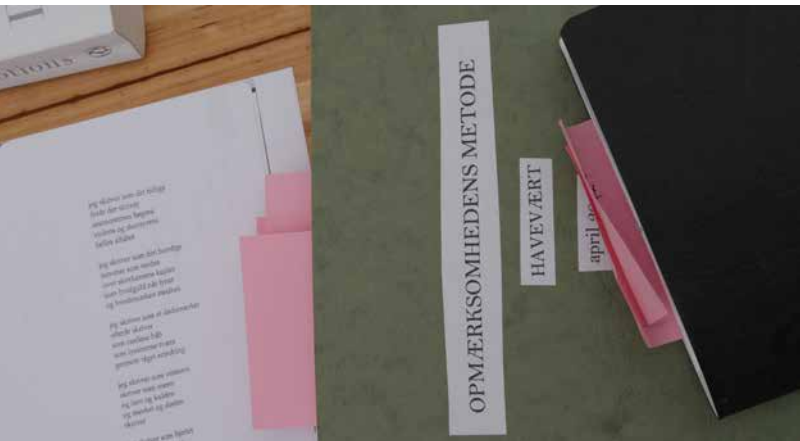
The purpose of this is to explore how artistic and regenerative approaches can unite cities and humans with nature. The end goal is to develop a series of design principles for the New European Bauhaus in an attempt to design the irresistible circular society for a future Europe.

# The Garden Caretakers have the floor



“To use writing as a magnifying glass to observe the location and its human and non-human inhabitants and to meet them through the writing. Poetic language can occupy itself profoundly and lingeringly with its surroundings by suggesting new perspectives and making it possible to see things in a different way than we are accustomed to.

—  
Helene Johanne Christensen,  
author and writing tutor,  
Garden Caretaker  
11-24 April 2023





“I see the Garden Caretaker project as a hub for environmental education and community engagement. A tool for reflecting on the diversity and interconnectedness of different species and ecosystems in relation to the local community by incorporating elements from different species and habitats.

—  
Davide Ronco,  
sculptor, Garden Caretaker  
23 October - 5 November 2023





“What is unique about art as a method is that one can get very close to certain phenomena and select the angles from which one wants to observe and interact with them

—  
Georg Jagunov,  
artist and sculptor, Garden Caretaker  
7-20 August 2023



“The intention is to establish stronger connections to the place and Earth through listening. I gather materials at the location, which I put into a different context – in the Garden Caretaker’s Greenhouse – where people are invited into a listening situation. Sound is created by touching the collected material. Listening requires a degree of calmness, a calmness that propagates in the human body over time.

—  
Arendse Krabbe,  
visual artist, Garden Caretaker  
11-24 September 2023



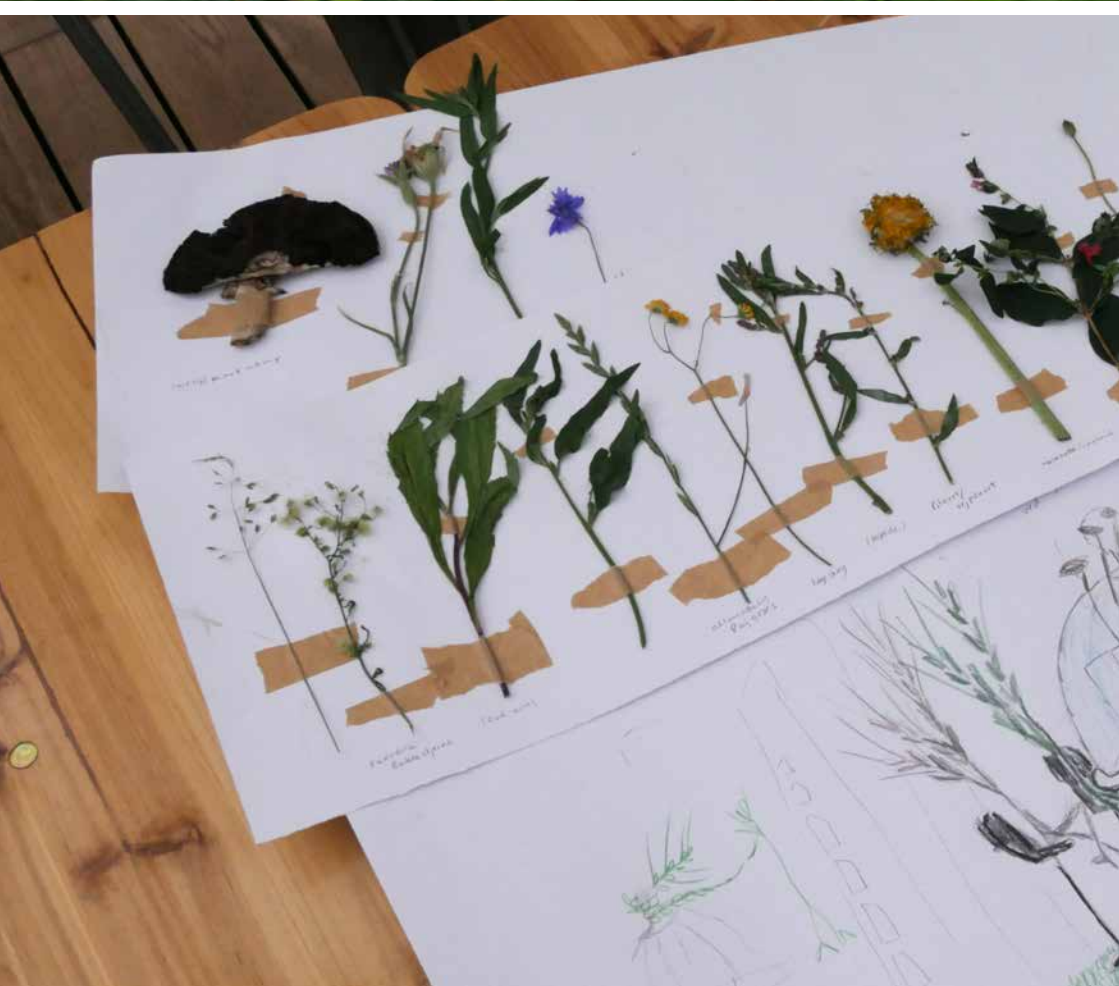


“Art can arouse emotions and in order to be able to act sustainably, we need to start feeling connected to the world that we are a part of. This is where art can make a difference. Art can make us see the world anew through lived experiences. It is a fantastic tool when we need to train ourselves to look at the world in a new way and start acting differently.



—  
Daily Fiction with  
Tora Balslev, performance artist,  
Garden Caretaker and  
Felia Gram-Hanssen, sound artist,  
Garden Caretaker  
February/March 2024









# The iterative process

With the Garden Caretaker project as a part of Desire<sup>6</sup> and The New European Bauhaus, we have chosen to work with an iterative process, designed for systems development, and based on the repetition of a linear sequence of activities until a desired goal is reached. The iterative process is a series of activities which move from abstract to concrete, from vague idea to tangible product. From development to testing and finally to implementation. The iterative process is a learning loop that is repeated until the goal set for the process is reached. Much in the same cyclical form as that scientific method from which the iterative process originates. From infant wonder to a question, which is formulated into a hypothesis. Next, a hypothesis which is tested through experiment and observation. Observation leads to either falsification or verification of the hypothesis, and thereby the opportunity for a new wonder, a new understanding, and new hypotheses, based on the rejection or confirmation of its predecessor.



# The Family Tree

## BEING OF PLACE

An interdisciplinary method to map site-specific qualities on building sites before they are developed.



**nxt**<sup>®</sup>

## DESIRE

– IRRESISTIBLE CIRCULAR SOCIETY.

24 partners in five EU-countries. Three angles of action and three Danish demonstrator sites (eight in total in Desire).

Principles: Circularity // Belonging // Biodiversity // Movement // Aesthetics



**desire** an irresistible circular society

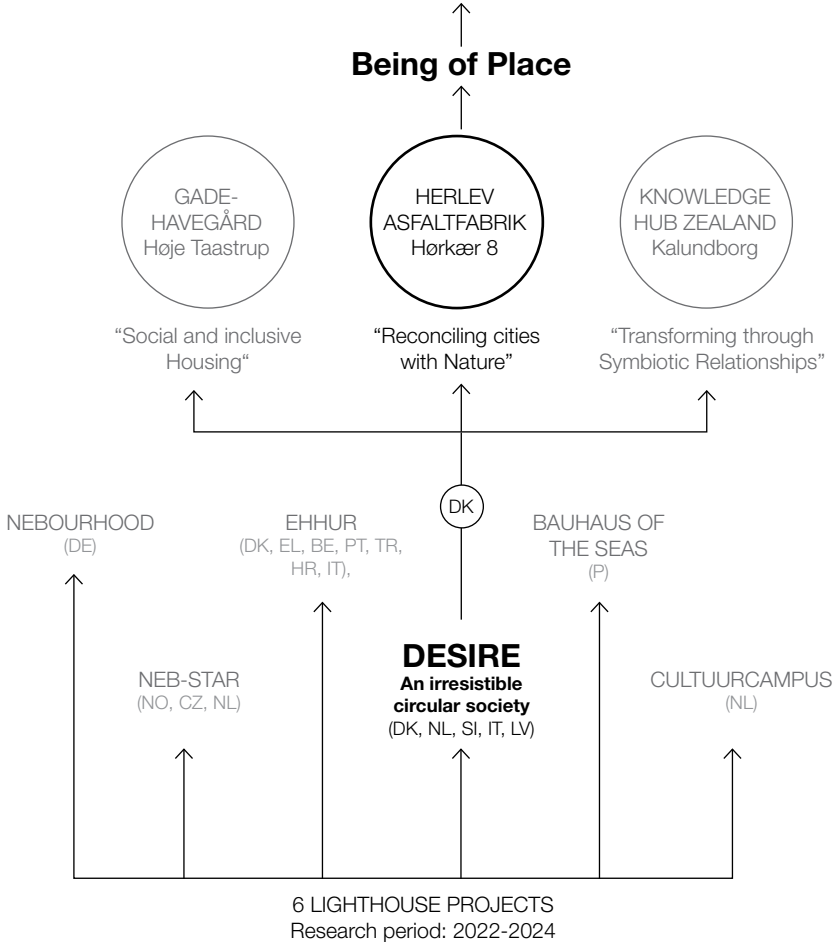
## NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS

“BEAUTIFUL. SUSTAINABLE. TOGETHER.”

About the initiative: The New European Bauhaus initiative connects the European Green Deal to our daily lives and living spaces. It calls on all Europeans to imagine and build together a sustainable and inclusive future that is beautiful for minds, and souls.



# The Garden Caretaker



## New European Bauhaus

"BEAUTIFUL. SUSTAINABLE. TOGETHER."

**Live  
but  
let  
live**





- 1 *Natural Artefacts – nature, repair, responsibility*  
– Waller, Marion - 2023
- 2 Inspired by Haraway, Donna
- 3 *Genius Loci – Towards a phenomenology of Architecture* – Norberg-Schulz, Christian - 1979
- 4 *Land Sickness* – Schultz, Nikolaj - 2023
- 5 *Notat om den nye økologiske klasse*  
– Latour & Schultz - 2022
- 6 Designing an Irresistible Circular Society  
– [www.irresistiblecircularity.eu/](http://www.irresistiblecircularity.eu/)





**can art  
be a tool  
for social and  
biological  
regeneration?**

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