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Romanticisation, and the future of Senan and beyond: Response to Luke Harris (2024), *Against wastelanding: distributed design at the pace of soil in the Conca de Barberà*

Reading Harris' paper challenged my preconceptions about the landscape of areas like the Conca de Barberà, whilst I also see his methodology as having great potential and hurdles in other projects. Harris refers to the notion that wooded wastelands like those found in the Conca de Barberà tend to be viewed romantically; a sign of nature's retaliation or recovery from humanity's interference when, in reality, the origins and 'health' of these spaces are much more complex. I will admit to being guilty of this from time to time, but I am sure this is a very common misunderstanding! Does more need to be done to raise awareness of the complexities of these spaces, especially at a time when environmental awareness is growing, so that we do not lose a critical approach? At a broader level, the misconceptions around these landscapes bring to mind greenwashing practices carried out by large organisations and businesses, as well as the limitations of carbon offsetting schemes. Do these interlink at all? How common is wastelanding globally (if such a thing can be measured)? I assume it comes in many forms and requires very different solutions in each case to enhance the existing bioinfrastructure.

I see the methodology of this project, a distributed design approach, having many benefits for those involved. For designers, it is an opportunity to develop a deeper appreciation and understanding of the processes involved in the long-term maintenance of a landscape than they might in undertaking a shorter, purely design-centric project. For those who live in and maintain these landscapes, having their voices heard and understood throughout must also be a gratifying experience. The project's timescale adds an exciting unknown element in thinking about potential future groups who might also contribute towards it. Ironically, while romanticising wastelands might be problematic, I find the community aspect of this project quite an idealistic endeavour in itself. Such an approach must surely be a tricky balancing act in ensuring everyone is in agreement and on equal footing with the proposed plans.

What would happen at the end of this project? It would be nice to think that this continued or evolved without the aid of the initial designers and those similar local-led initiatives developed around Senan, both for its relative simplicity and the community aspect it encourages. The Conca de Barberà seems like a remote area of Spain; would challenges arise in trying to conduct this sort of project elsewhere, perhaps in more densely populated areas where the acquisition of land for housing and business developments is more intense? It may be difficult to convince landowners to participate and commit to a project like this when there could be more lucrative alternatives available to them, particularly in times of financial hardship.

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