Unbuilt Land Revisited

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Many are familiar with unbuilt land in cities like vacant plots. Never fully human, these lands become places of imagination, exploration, diversity, and refuge. Without such places, species and forms of cultural expressions that rely on these niches migrate or become locally extinct.

Our time “is about the destruction of places and times of refuge for people and other critters”.1 Pressure to develop capital value of land currently overshadows other forms of value, causing loss of unbuilt land accompanied by loss of the biological and cultural values they shelter. If unbuilt land in cities disappears, we lose places of potential encounter.

Within the ongoing discussion regarding urban densification as one response to the climate crisis, the research focuses attention on unbuilt land as in cities that face economic pressure to maximise land development. The research positions unbuilt land as sites of contact between diverse species and cultural expressions, and thereby a vital component of dense cities.

In order to resist development pressure at the expense of biological and cultural diversity, we need to identify and acknowledge alternative forms of value held in unbuilt land. In addition, we need to find creative modes of interacting with these places by engaging with location-specific conditions and micro-ecologies.

The research aims to address this issue systematically through field studies of two plots of unbuilt land in Oslo, Norway. The explorations will critically and analytically reflect on the existing conditions of these plots to unfold their potentials as sites of diverse biology and cultural expression. In doing so, the investigations also discuss the sets of human disciplines in fields like biology, culture, politics, and technologies that are required to identify and acknowledge alternative (to capital) values held in unbuilt land. The built systematic overview from the field studies aims to contribute to existing discussions within the disciplines of architecture, landscape and urban planning on urban densification.