

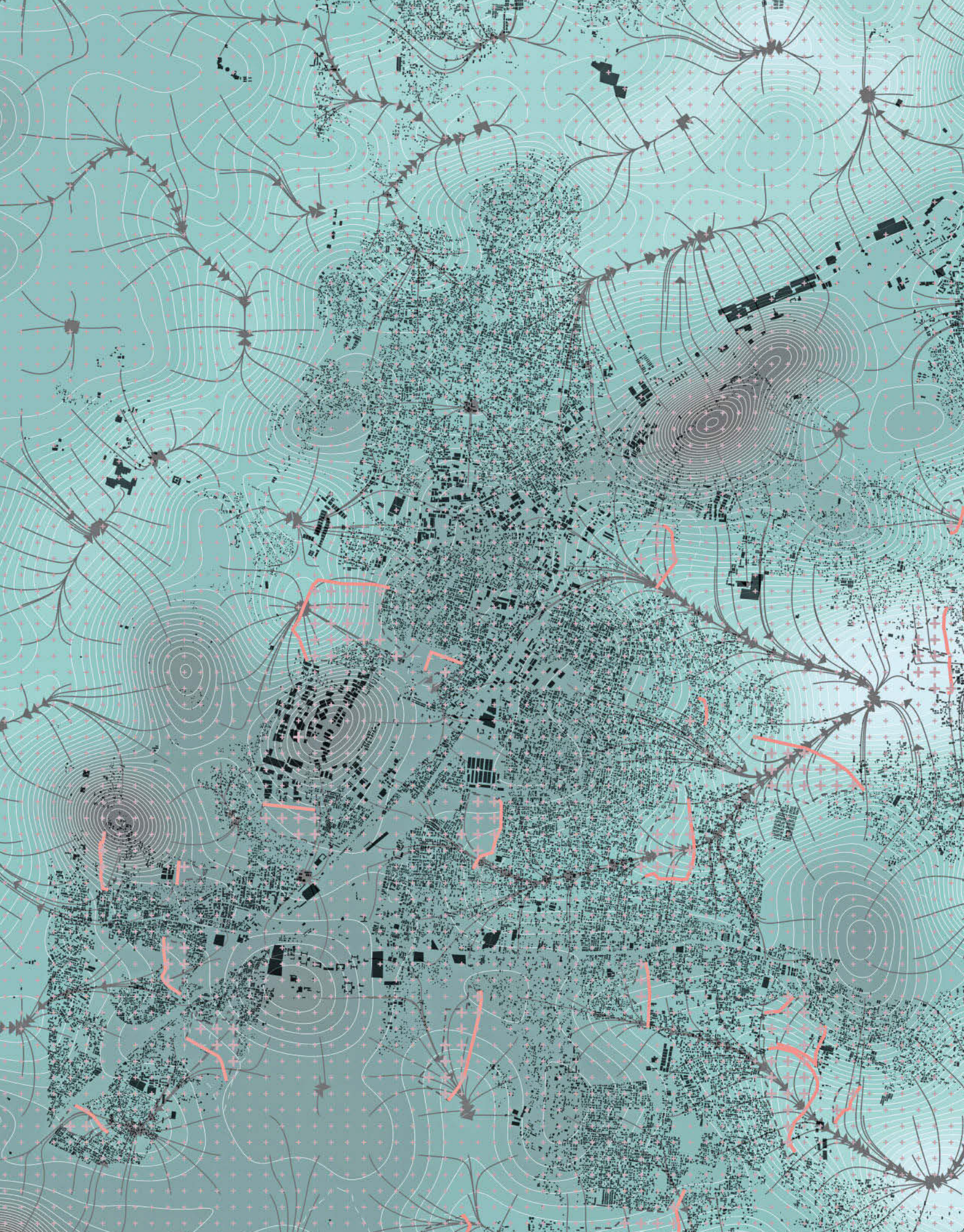


# GREEN NEW DEAL LANDSCAPES

01 | Vol 92 | 2022

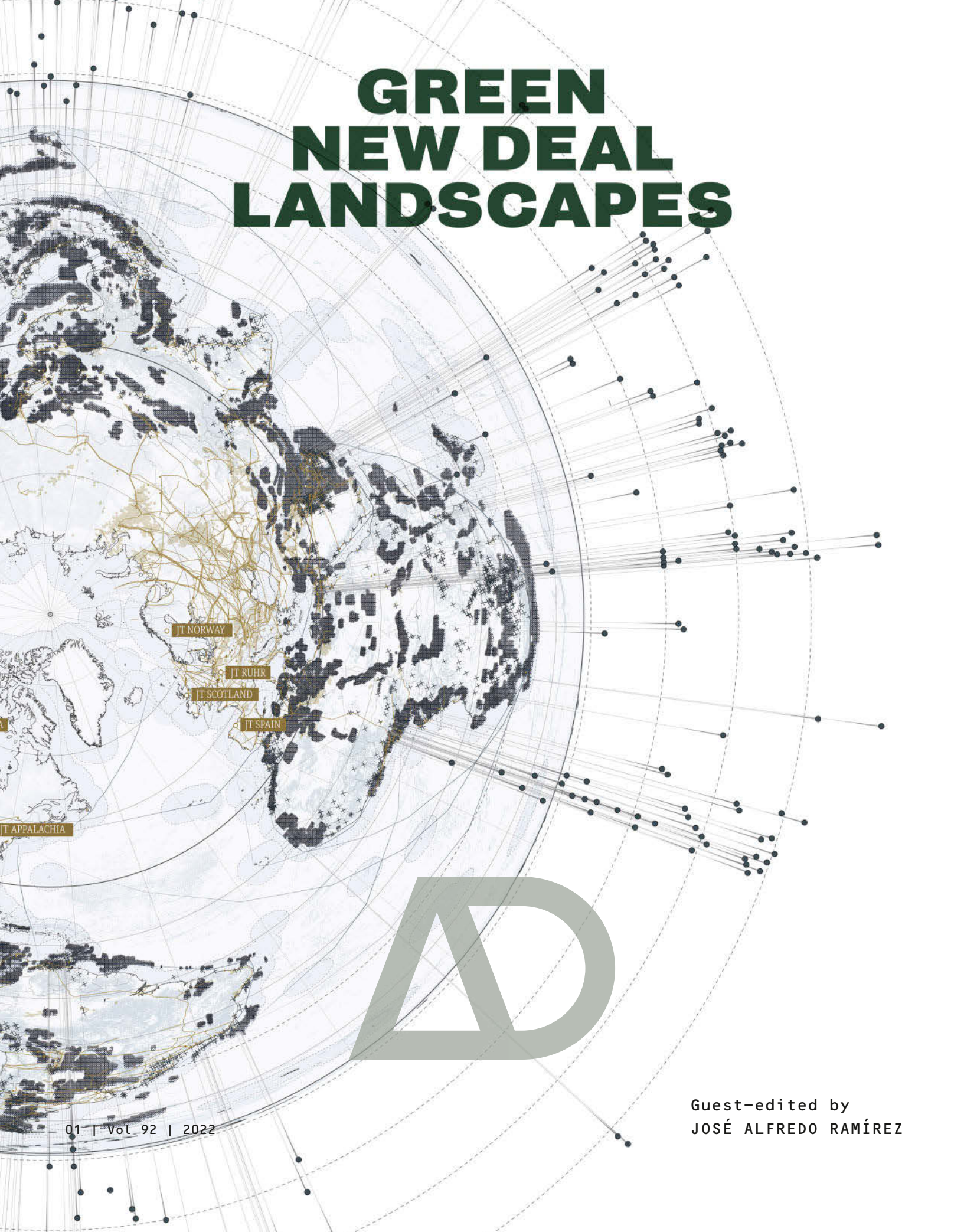
Guest-edited by  
JOSÉ ALFREDO RAMÍREZ







# GREEN NEW DEAL LANDSCAPES



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IT SCOTLAND

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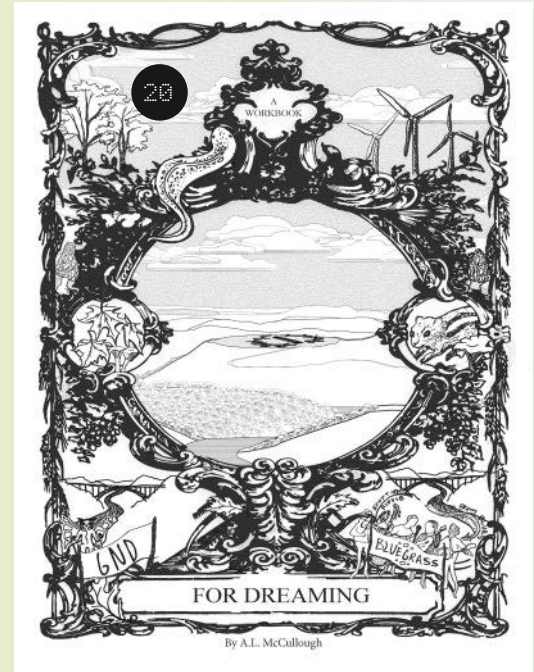
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Elena Luciano Suastegui, Rafael Martinez Caldera and Yasmina Yehia, *Renewable Landscapes of Treherbert*, Just Transition, AA Landscape Urbanism, Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture, London, 2019. © Elena Luciano Suastegui, Rafael Martinez Caldera and Yasmina Yehia

#### Inside front cover

Tom Benson, *Detail of a map of South Chennai, India, Monsoon Assemblages*, University of Westminster, London, 2017. © Tom Benson, Monsoon Assemblages

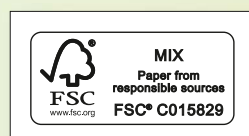
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Elena Luciano Suastegui, Rafael Martinez Caldera and Yasmina Yehia, *Just Transition*, AA Landscape Urbanism, London, 2019. © Elena Luciano Suastegui, Rafael Martinez Caldera and Yasmina Yehia

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ABOUT THE  
**GUEST-EDITOR**

JOSÉ ALFREDO RAMÍREZ



José Alfredo Ramírez explores the relationship between policymaking and climate change through a series of research and commissioned projects with a variety of institutions and think tanks such as the British Council and Common Wealth in the UK, and the Inter-American Development Bank. As a co-director of the Ground Lab research design initiative of the Architectural Association's (AA) Residence Programme, he is interested in developing alternative landscape-oriented practices where skills including visualisation, mapping, spatial understanding of socioecological systems and landscape techniques can advance design strategies to tackle climate breakdown. He has led projects at the junction of architecture, landscape and urbanism in a variety of contexts such as Argentina, Chile, China, Mexico, Spain, Russia, Chile and the UK, and worked on large-scale urban projects including the redevelopment of a 12-kilometre section of Santiago de Chile's main avenue, Alameda Providencia, into an integral transport and urban corridor, the 2012 London Olympics masterplan and the renovation of Sokolniki Park in Moscow.

He is also a co-director of the AA Landscape Urbanism MArch/MSc postgraduate programme, which investigates the role of architects and landscape architects within contemporary processes of planetary urbanisation. Most recently, the research has been focusing on the consequences of the potential implementation of a Green New Deal in the UK. Through a series of partnerships with various institutions and think tanks currently shaping Green New Deal agendas, such as the New Economic Foundation and Common Wealth, the aim is to link the design profession with the existing Green New Deal movement and encourage collaborations and dialogue with policymakers, activists and other professions.

A dual Mexican and British citizen, Ramírez lectures worldwide and has published several essays, articles and book chapters on the work of AA Landscape Urbanism and Ground Lab, including in the book *Critical Territories: From Academia to Praxis* (Listlab, 2013), of which he was a co-editor. ▢



# Designing Landscapes

## How Policies Shape the World

### INTRODUCTION

JOSÉ ALFREDO RAMÍREZ

AA Ground Lab,  
A Warming Planet,  
Architectural Association (AA)  
School of Architecture,  
London,  
2020

A planetary visualisation of global warming. The still is part of a video commissioned by the Inter-American Development Bank to visualise global warming fuelling the migration crisis. Global warming is caused by the increase of carbon emissions in the atmosphere. A GND aims to decarbonise the global economy and keep global temperature below a 1.5°C increase, to avoid runaway climate breakdown.



Whether you live in a city, small town, rural/agricultural area or on Indigenous land, today's world landscapes have inevitably been shaped by the implementation of a deliberate system of principles commonly known as policies. Policies have been configuring landscapes, defining the way we organise our lives and our relations with nature through the implementation of procedures and protocols that ultimately organise how we produce the products we consume, the material we need for those products, and the labour we require to manage our relations with other humans and nonhumans alike. This is even more evident for the landscape-oriented design professions. Policies define the types of projects we develop, the way we get involved, the materials we specify, the steps we follow to build environments, the ownership profits, safety, activities and uses allowed or whether public or private interests are to be prioritised.

This  $\Delta$  issue explores the landscape impact of specific policies and calls for designers to acknowledge, understand and rethink how they are actively shaping the world we are living in today. Policies are the result of the economic system that dominates the world: capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Most of them have been designed to support and advance the system as it is today. However, in the last decades, especially since the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, the world has been slowly and hesitantly waking up to the fact that this economic system has been fuelling the climate crisis for centuries. Based on endless economic growth in a finite planet, capitalism promotes a 'high consumption economy based on planned obsolescence',<sup>2</sup> dependent on the exploitation and the cheapening of lives and nature in the poorest parts of the world.



Elena Longhin,  
Aralkum Desert,  
Kazakhstan,  
AA Landscape Urbanism,  
Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture,  
London,  
2014

The Aral Sea has become a desert. The relentless demand for cotton for the fashion industry in Europe was one of the main reasons for water extraction and its exhaustion in the area.

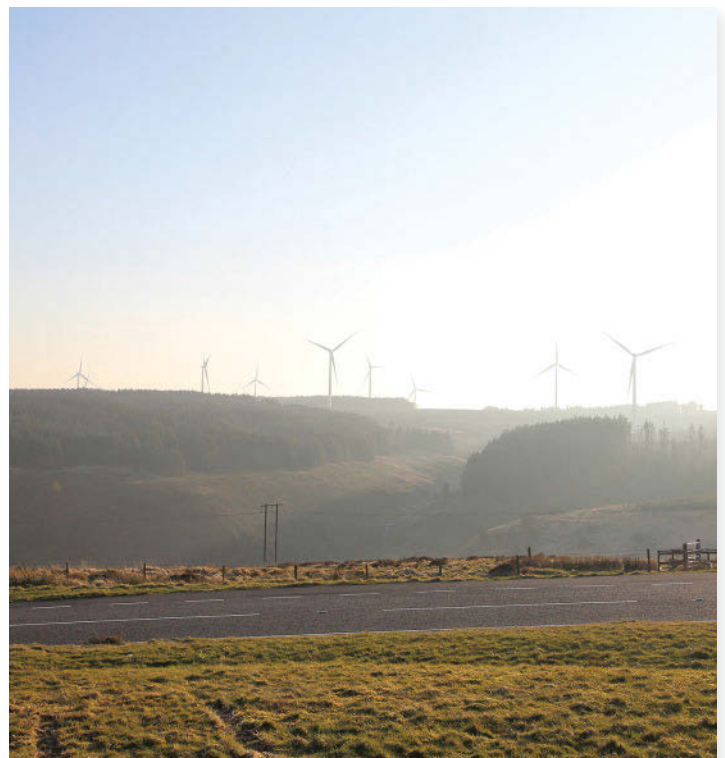


Google Earth view of land pattern transformation,  
Aragón, Spain,  
2000-2016

Google Earth screenshot of the confluence of the rivers Arga and Aragón in Spain. The comparison reveals continuous land consolidation in favour of large landowners due to the implementation of economic policies in the area. To ensure water supply for monoculture plantations in dry seasons, the Spanish government is building a water canal from the Pyrenees. The infrastructure will deliver water supply only to farms bigger than 5 hectares (12 acres), eliminating small farm owners in the process.

Elena Luciano Suastegui,  
Rafael Martínez Caldera  
and Yasmina Yehia,  
Renewable Landscapes of Treherbert,  
Just Transition,  
AA Landscape Urbanism,  
Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture,  
London,  
2019

This forest and windmills in Treherbert, Wales belong to the Forestry Commission and to foreign venture capitalists respectively. They are the result of local policies implemented in the area to promote so-called 'sustainable' practices. However, local communities can neither access the forest nor benefit from the energy extraction from the region, despite suffering the continuous transformation of their lands over centuries.



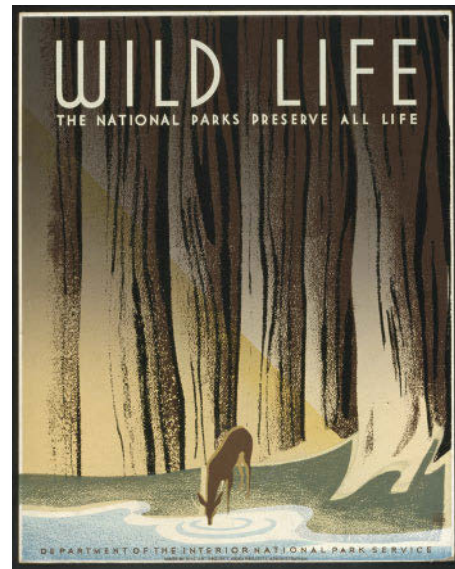


## Green New Deals

If capitalist policies are mainly responsible for the production of the spaces we inhabit and the climate crisis, this  $\Delta$  issue is aligned to an alternative set of policies put forward by activists and thinkers called the Green New Deal (GND). The aim is to reconfigure landscapes via the decarbonisation of the global economy while stopping the exploitation of people and nature, mainly in the Global South. Envisioning a different system, the GND has been born, reborn, reworked and reappropriated in various ways by people, institutions and organisations across the UK, US, Europe and the Global South,<sup>3</sup> and therefore has manifold faces that could benefit from or be impacted negatively by it. Detailing the different types of GNDs is beyond the scope of this  $\Delta$ ;<sup>4</sup> instead, the issue focuses on portraying different ways in which designers are getting involved in shaping a just GND to tackle the current emergency of the climate crisis with planetary dimensions.

## What are GND Landscapes?

'GND landscapes' refers to the potential socio-spatial consequences that the implementation of GND policies could bring about. It also refers to a design practice where the transition to those policies is conceived and interrogated through the perspective of the landscapes produced as a consequence.<sup>5</sup> A GND landscape could be an urban agglomeration where buildings are locally retrofitted and deconstructed rather than demolished or built anew with materials from afar. It could mean food sovereignty across nations where agriculture comprises seasonal and commons practices of polyculture crops and rewilding agroecology techniques rather than agribusiness, global food chains and monoculture, so prevalent today. It could explore the implications of prioritising public collective transport and infrastructure rather than individual car ownership. Or could address the implementation of new spaces and programmes dedicated to care work and care activities where people are valued for who they are and how they care and not for what they own or for what they can pay for.



Frank S Nicholson,  
US National Park Service poster,  
late 1930s

The Work Projects Administration (WPA) Poster Collection consists of 907 posters produced from 1936 to 1943. Posters were designed to publicise exhibitions, community activities, theatrical productions, and health and educational programmes in 17 states and the District of Columbia. They were part of the New Deal, a precedent of the contemporary Green New Deal, but their production continued beyond the New Deal implementation as initiatives were taken over by local authorities and institutions beyond the federal government.

Lyon Bosch + Martic, AA Ground Lab,  
Idom and Sergio Chiquetto,  
Paseo Civico Metropolitano,  
Santiago, Chile,  
2015

Paseo Civico Metropolitano comprises the design of a 12-kilometre (7.5-mile) transport/urban corridor in the main avenue of Santiago de Chile, Alameda Providencia. The project enhances the public space and integrates public transport into the civic life of Santiago by prioritising pedestrian and bicycle movement. It creates a linear plaza framed by a landscape of water and trees that brings back the character of the corridor as an 'alameda of trees'.





## **Design and Policy Perspectives from the Global North**

Since its inception in the Global North, the GND has spanned a sweep of proposals with various forms and contents, from tinkering at the edges of the capitalist system with small reform proposals to more comprehensive visions for radical transformations. Writing in this issue, Miriam Brett, director of London-based think tank Common Wealth, gives a radical perspective from the Global North by looking at how the UK can feasibly and rapidly implement a GND through a 'Community Wealth Building' concept in the context of cities such as Glasgow. Common Wealth, with the AA Ground Lab, at London's Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture, has created such a vision working alongside stakeholders in the city with tangible interventions at building, neighbourhood and city scales. Billy Fleming of the Weitzman School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania reflects on his leadership role within the Ian L McHarg Center where the focus is on policymaking, activism and design practices for a US GND. His reflection poses crucial questions to designers to avoid elite co-optation of GND principles and meet the scale, scope and pace of works required while maintaining democratic values. Fleming asks designers to align their skills and practices to meet the challenges and broaden the climate justice movement.

## **Speculative Practices for a GND**

Some answers to Fleming's question could come from practices that prioritise the public sector, local communities or global commons. For this, it is necessary to reveal or visualise power relations that are usually hidden by landscape frames or architectural design practices. In the latter, Clara Olóriz Sanjuán, co-director of the AA Ground Lab, asks us to raise the stakes for landscape, to tackle the climate crisis head on. By acknowledging the profession's complicity in the making of the crisis and its historical role in legitimising the status of elite classes, she illustrates Ground Lab practice as an example of design work that attempts to 'de-fetishise' landscape and allows the profession to have an honest dialogue with the people and landscapes it serves. AA Landscape Urbanism graduates Elena Luciano Suastegui, Rafael Martinez Caldera and Yasmina Yehia put forward a research project on 'just transition' policies to envision a GND landscape in one of the most deprived areas of Wales: Treherbert. Their project developed as a collaboration with Welcome to Our Woods where a small community can reappropriate the surrounding forest to transition from a monoculture wood factory into a healthy and biodiverse forest where leisure and alternative economic activities go beyond historical extractivist models.

AA Landscape Urbanism graduates Daniel Kiss and Swadheet Chaturvedi expand the GND scope to a planetary scale by discussing the ocean resources in Antarctica as global commons where 'sustainable' management is crucial to challenge climate breakdown. Their proposal to visualise and regulate extraction suggests a necessary scale of intervention where remote consequential landscapes<sup>6</sup> are

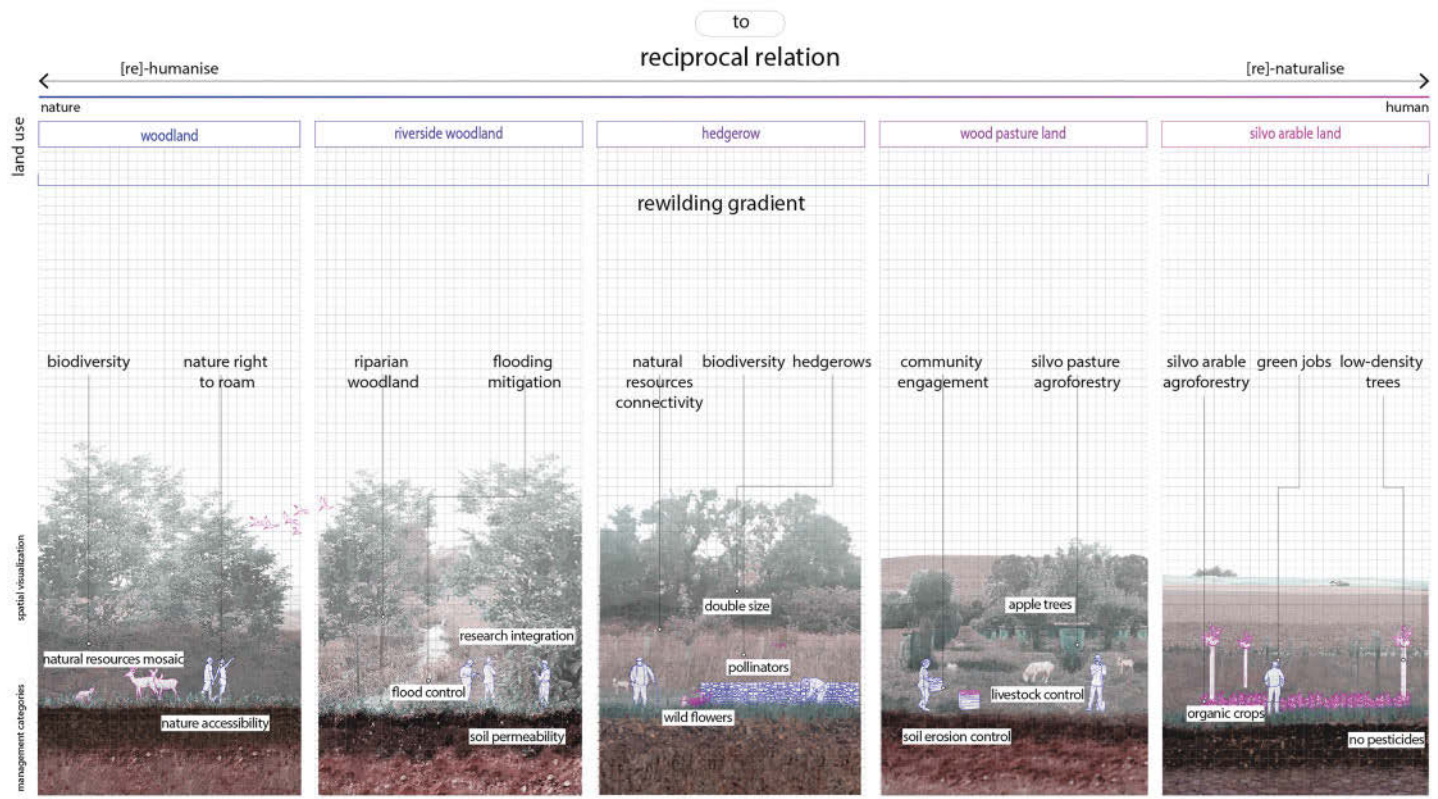
# **The GND has been born, reborn, reworked and reappropriated in various ways by people, institutions and organisations across the UK, US, Europe and the Global South**

at the heart of a GND. Jon Goodbun, Christina Leigh Geros and Godofredo Enes Pereira from London's Royal College of Art expand this focus from the perspective of socio-environmental impacts of resource extractions in the Global South. Extractive activities are usually left aside in GND discussions, especially when renewables are branded as the solutions for the climate crisis. With the motto 'Take back the land', they suggest the engagement of design practices in the reclamation of land that has been historically dispossessed from Indigenous nations, peasantry and many other groups to support them in their fight to organise, implement and imagine other worlds.

## **Care and Design Practices within GND**

Care should be at the heart of GND. Care work, paid and unpaid, is given little consideration in the capitalist economy despite its heavy dependency on it, yet – as Julian Siravo from the Autonomy think tank argues – it is the most fundamentally green work. Siravo encourages us to design alternative models and spaces for work, the activity to which we dedicate most of our waking life. It is not only important for a GND to create new jobs but also to interrogate what kind of jobs, for whom, how and when. Jane Mah Hutton of the University of Waterloo School of Architecture in Cambridge, Ontario, and Alison Creba of Toronto's Wychwood Barns artist and community spaces venue discuss with Mae Bowley, of the nonprofit organisation Re:Purpose Savannah, a counter-model to building a 'New World' based on the 'building deconstruction and material reuse sector', and taking care of existing buildings rather than erecting new ones. Reusing existing materials and banning landfill reduce extractive and wasteful activities from the construction industry. Caring for the existing world to imagine a new one brings about a radical yet necessary alternative within GND landscapes.





## Perspectives from the Global South

Power relations in a globalised world are uneven. The richness of the Global North depends on the extraction and exploitation of the Global South, and a just GND needs to break this dependency. The Global South includes exploited countries and nations-within-nations such as the Indigenous ones in the US, Mexico and Australia – among many others. In this context, assistant professors Manuel Shvartzberg Carrió of the Urban Studies and Planning department at the University of California San Diego and Danika Cooper of the College of Environmental Design at the University of California, Berkeley, explain the 'Red Deal' – a call for action of the North American Indigenous nations to go beyond a GND. They call for Indigenous land 'rematriation' as the precondition for tackling the climate crisis. Assuring the self-determination of Indigenous nations will set the stage for a liveable planet and a resurgence of practices that focus on a reciprocal relation between humans and nature rather than an exploitative one.

In Mexico, I make the case for projects that exemplify different takes from the Global South: the critical use of new technologies to aid decision-makers in building water resilience in Mexico City, and the reclamation of ancient Indigenous knowledge to address climate change challenges in Oaxaca and manage a large wetland system in Mexico City to create thriving landscapes. In Australia,

landscape architects Liam Mouritz and Alex Breedon present 'Design with Country', a concept that demonstrates how aboriginals in Australia holistically understand nature and its relation to humans. Mouritz and Breedon take us on a tour around the country practices to decolonise a settler colonial territory by learning from and embedding Indigenous values in the design profession. Lindsay Bremner of the School of Architecture and Cities at the University of Westminster, London, presents the case of Monsoon Assemblages, a European Research Council-funded project that aims to place solidarity, responsibility and reparation as main values for design practices. Bremner offers a careful reading of monsoons' intricate interconnections with the climate politics of Southeast Asia and the Global North.

## Alternative Models for Urbanisation

Urban Age narratives and policies that promote cities as the ultimate model for world prosperity while ignoring the landscapes that fuel them are challenged by the last two articles. Long-held assumptions of cities as models for the most sustainable, green, resilient and technically advanced ways of life are exposed by political economist Kai Heron and agroecology farmer Alex Heffron, as well as by environmental historian Troy Vettese, architect Filip Mesko, and Drew Pendergrass, a PhD candidate in Environmental Engineering at Harvard University. All agree on the historical origins of



the crisis and use similar references to analyse current conditions of the world climate breakdown. However, they differ in the means to achieve a radical transformation. The latter propose the design of half-earth socialism by recovering the art of planning to achieve a global transformation for a planetary challenge. In contrast, Heron and Heffron advocate for the abolition of hinterlands based on land sharing and opportunities to practice agroecology and renew the land–human relation where a GND can stop the alienation of humans from nature.

### Design and Political Consciousness

This  $\Delta$  issue addresses the GND project because we need to get behind collective efforts to tackle the biggest challenge the world has faced – one that no individual effort or even a single private enterprise, no matter how creative or powerful, could address, let alone solve. At the same time the issue adopts critiques,<sup>7</sup> both for the GNDs to prioritise social justice and for the design professions to explore other roles to help the envisioning of new worlds. Against apolitical stances where, for example, a faith in

technology is usually the ingredient for claiming radical and innovative projects, a political consciousness could reinforce humility, reciprocity and solidarity as profession values. An awareness that we are not isolated from socio-environmental conditions and that instead, we can contribute to ambitious goals and larger projects beyond the remit of the discipline is fundamental to the continuous rethinking of the profession. This  $\Delta$  stands as a portrait of how GND landscapes and design practices are collaborating to support this much-needed transformation.  $\Delta$

### Notes

1. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, Penguin (London), 2015.
2. Max Ajl, *A People's Green New Deal*, Pluto Press (London), 2021, p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*, pp 9–12.
4. For an explanation of the various Green New Deals, see Ajl, *op cit.*
5. Clara Olóriz Sanjuán, 'Introduction', *Landscape as Territory*, Actar (Barcelona), 2019, pp 5–16.
6. See *ibid.*
7. Douglas Spencer, *Critique of Architecture*, Birkhäuser (Basel), 2021, pp 18–26.



Asociación DOCE and UDDA Arquitectura y Urbanismo, Huertos del Canal, Zaragoza, Spain, 2013

Huertos del Canal are 420 allotments located amid the Montecanal, Rosales del Canal and Valdefierro neighbourhoods in Zaragoza. Asociación DOCE is a nonprofit organisation behind the implementation which aimed to create urban agriculture for local housing supply, exemplifying the benefits that agroecology and similar practices in urban environments could bring.

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# Visualising a Transformative Space that Puts People and Climate First

