

Landscapes after Labor. Notes on Industrial Heritage and Transformation

A conversation with Iris Dupper by Ilinca Păun Constantinescu

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Over the past decades, the post-industrial landscape has become one of the most charged terrains of contemporary design: an unstable nexus of memory, ecological recovery, and political contestation. Within this field, few practices have exerted as sustained and transformative an influence as Latz + Partner, whose pioneering engagement with the cultural and ecological potential of industrial ruins, from Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord to Parco Dora, has profoundly shaped European understandings of industrial heritage.

As co-director of Latz + Partner, **Iris Dupper** belongs to a generation of designers who bridge the office's foundational legacy with contemporary urgencies: the fragility of post-industrial materiality, the accelerating disappearance of industrial traces, the political pressures of urban redevelopment, and the long-duration agency of ecological processes. Her work has been central in advancing the practice's multi-scalar approach, one that reads industrial sites as palimpsests of labor, vegetation, extraction, logistics, and cultural memory.

I had the pleasure of visiting Iris Dupper in their office in late autumn 2025, spending a long afternoon in conversation about the studio's ongoing projects. The setting itself made clear how inseparably their environment is tied to their design ethos. The office of Latz + Partner in Kranzberg, north of Munich is a remarkable embodiment of the firm's philosophy: an architecture deeply intertwined with landscape, ecology, and daylight. (Fig. 1) Surrounded by soft hills above the Ampertal, the building encloses a central courtyard; it opens to the south toward a pond and expansive meadows, creating a seamless transition between workspace and landscape. Generous glass façades, a greenhouse-like winter garden, exposed timber structures, and dense planting reflect the studio's commitment to sustainable, context-sensitive design. Inside, the open wooden workspace, strewn with drawings, models, maps, and material samples, captures the collaborative atmosphere of a practice known for transforming complex sites and engaging with ecological processes across decades.

Our conversation unfolded at the intersection of landscape and the afterlife of industry, exploring how design mediates between historical sediments and future imaginaries, between ecological succession and political struggle, and between the intricate traces of past work and the uncertain forms of labor yet to come.

Ilinca Păun Constantinescu: *We first met in Romania during the international architectural competition for the Rulmentul industrial site in Braşov, where you acted as president of the jury. I was struck by the clarity with which you perceived the large-scale industrial site in transformation — the layers, the chronological traces, the structural and ecological relationships. How do you approach the multiple temporalities inscribed in post-industrial sites?*

Iris Dupper: Thank you, Ilinca. I have very vivid memories of that moment: the dialogue between jury members, the diversity of interpretations, and the richness of the Romanian industrial context. Encounters like those reveal how different cultural and territorial perspectives can broaden one's own practice.



Fig. 1: Latz + Partner Office, Ampertshausen. Studio and garden ensemble integrated into the rolling terrain

From the outset, my practice has always been grounded in real contexts rather than abstract propositions. We rarely begin with a blank page; we work with sites where time is already materially inscribed. Industrial landscapes contain multiple temporalities, many of them coexisting in tension. These layers include the rational geometries of production, the scars of abandonment, the ecological traces of succession, and the social narratives that persist long after workers have left. All these dimensions overlap and inform one another. This framing is inseparable from our contextual approach. We work with existing layers, structures, and ecological processes rather than against them. Reading context means acknowledging both the rational logics of industrial production and the spontaneous developments that occurred after abandonment. It means understanding time as both an erosive force and a generative one. This approach has guided our long-term projects, some of which span 15 or 20 years and embody complex temporal processes.

Reflecting on *Rulmentul* and about the often-generalized fear of working with inherited structures, I have to admit from the start that I see no contradiction between preservation and transformation. The structures tell a specific story about the process of production, of hard labor and technical invention. On the contrary, many of our regeneration projects demonstrate that retaining the industrial core creates identity and anchors new forms of activity. Heritage can serve as a catalyst rather than an obstacle. This layered understanding also served as the foundation for our conversations in Romania. It is rooted in a belief that industrial landscapes demand not only technical expertise but an emotional and intellectual responsiveness — a capacity to listen to the many temporalities that shape them. And it is shaped by encounters such as ours, where shared values and complementary perspectives enrich the interpretation of these territories.

IPC: *Your work engages deeply with layered contexts — temporal, material, ecological, and social. When approaching a post-industrial site, what does it mean for you to “read” these layers, as mentioned, and how does this process shape your design methodology?*

ID: Reading a site is an act of interpretation. It begins with acknowledging its complexity. Every layer — material, ecological, historical — has something to say and define the starting point for any project. Before designing, we spend substantial time reading the context. For us, the first step is always to understand what should be respected and preserved, what can be transformed,



Fig. 2: Golden entrance at the Esplanade TASE, Lyon (Vaulx-en-Velin)

and what must be allowed to evolve. This reading includes not only monumental elements but also subtle traces — patterns of decay, infrastructural remnants, informal pathways — that often reveal hidden potentials. We search for the intrinsic potentials of a place, the spatial pockets where structures still breathe, the textures where material degradation reveals new aesthetic possibilities, and the zones where vegetation has established itself on its own. Decay, often received negatively, is a form of knowledge. It shows how materials behave over time, how nature intervenes, and how the site adapts. It is evidence of lived processes. By transforming it into a positive perception, we allow users to develop new relationships with the site.

IPC: *The traces of industrial labor, like spatial imprints, material residues, and infrastructural fragments, form a crucial part of your reading of post-industrial landscapes. How do these traces guide your interpretive process and influence the transformations you propose?*

ID: When we approach such sites, we begin by recognizing what I call “identity-giving elements.” These elements may be major, such as blast furnaces or water towers, but they can also be modest — inner walls, rails, foundations, or residues of infrastructure. What matters is their capacity to express a continuity of meaning. In many projects, such as the Esplanade Tase in Vaulx-en-Velin, (Fig. 3) with its land reserves on abandoned industrial site, bordered by the Jonage Canal and public infrastructure, has become a strategic hub for urban development in the metropolitan area of Lyon, both economically and residentially. We chose to keep and transform these elements like parts of the concrete ground floor slab of the building or the passageway which became the main entrance to the Esplanade. These elements give orientation, atmosphere, and depth to the emerging public spaces.



Fig. 3: Esplanade TASE, Lyon (Vaulx-en-Velin). Creation of a public space on the site of a former textile factory

But reading traces also involves acknowledging processes of transformation, revealing how time acts on material. Our role is to reinterpret these signs — transforming them from perceived degradation into meaningful indicators of transition. This process represents a shift from a mindset of erasure to one of re-evaluation, helping communities understand the value embedded in these transformations.

A good example is the Piazza Metallica in the Duisburg Nord Landscape Park (Fig. 4). The iron plates that once covered the pig-iron casting molds remained full of marks left by industrial processes and physical weathering. Instead of replacing them, Peter Latz allowed them to continue rusting, integrating both their historical imprint and their ongoing transformation into the heart of a new public space. There, industrial memory is not fossilized — it is allowed to evolve. It has become an inspiring place, serving all kinds of events, such as neighborhood events or as film set (Tributes of Panem, District 12)

IPC: *Material reuse appears as an essential strategy in your projects. You often reinterpret existing elements, repurpose structural fragments, and integrate remaining industrial substrates into new landscapes.*

ID: Material reuse is both a conceptual approach and a practical necessity. Industrial sites provide a unique inventory of existing materials — concrete slabs, steel structures, foundations, walls, rubble, soils — all shaped by decades of use. Instead of importing new materials, we begin by examining what is already present on-site. This allows the design to grow from the site's own history, logic, and materiality.

One of our key strategies is upcycling: reinterpreting existing materials to enhance both identity and ecological function. At the Esplanade Tase in Lyon, where the central space gives way to a canopy of fine foliage, which replaces the roof of the old industrial halls. For example, we reused the concrete floor slab from the former textile halls as crushed material for reuse on site. In this way we transformed former mineral surfaces into public green with 260 new trees,



Fig. 4: Piazza Metallica, Landscape park Duisburg Nord. A metamorphosis of the existing hard and rugged industrial structure into a public space

2,500 shrubs, and 3,500 perennials. By optimizing the stockage of the excavated concrete of the building site nearby and crushing it on a platform it could be reused on site for structures under streets, substrates (*terre / pierre*) for plantings and drainage ditches. The financial gain of this method is estimated around 400 K€TTC and 175 tons of CO₂ avoided. In the adjacent project Sheds (Fig. 5, 6), the concrete base of the former halls was transformed into a new parking area. Rather than removing it completely, we carved draining ditches and larger surfaces for planting beds directly into the slab. The resulting rubble was sorted by grain size and reused as crushed stone, earth-stone mixtures, or mulch. Vegetation gradually transformed this once mineral surface by natural dynamics of an initial planting into a heat resilient network of green islands, creating shade and microclimates while retaining the historic character of the factory.

Similarly, the intense orange tones of the industrial walls and the inscriptions from the former silk factory became central aesthetic elements. Instead of concealing them, we replicated their chromatic intensity on the ground, creating orange pedestrian corridors and graphic signaling that extend the visual language of the sheds. Industrial identity is not only preserved — it is amplified and reinterpreted. Designing with existing substrates, rather than replacing them, allows the landscape to emerge from the site's own material intelligence.

Parco Dora in Turin demonstrates how preserving remaining structures — columns, canopies, beams — can generate new spatial systems. The layout echoes the logic of production while generating spaces of leisure and movement. The design derives from the most important elements such as the large hall of the sheet metal works in the center of the park (Capannone di Strippaggio, Fig. 7), the widely visible Michelin cooling towers, the substructure of the Ingest laminating works and the concrete canal of the river Dora. The transformation and new use of these historic industrial elements have lent each of the five areas of the park its own character and strengthen the residents' sense of belonging to "their" park. One example in the spectacular central part is Vitali, where we just took off some light metal facades and rotten roofs but



Fig. 5, 6 (above and below): Esplanade TASE, Lyon (Vaulx-en-Velin), Parking Sheds. Development of a parking lot with up-cycling and green islands on the site of historic sheds: above in 2021 and below in 2023





Fig. 7 (above): Parco Dora, Turin. Central Hall (Capannone di Strippaggio)

Fig. 8 (below): Parco Dora, Turin, Vitali and Corso Mortara areas. Industrial remains and open landscape



kept the roof of the highest hall, which is 200 m long. One part exposes the forest of steel, another part shelters from sun and rain. (Fig. 8) The following elements or “layers” determine the content and spatial framework of the Parco Dora: Industrial remains, the element water, linking elements such as promenades, ramps and bridges and space defining vegetation.

For us, material reuse is never a nostalgic gesture. It is an ecological strategy, a cultural approach, and a design philosophy. It respects the embodied energy and history of materials, revealing their potential to contribute to future narratives.

IPC: *Spontaneous vegetation is often considered a “problem” on abandoned sites. Yet in your work, it becomes a design tool. How do you negotiate between planned landscape design and the ecological processes that emerge naturally on these sites?*

ID: Spontaneous vegetation and introduced neophytes (e.g. introduced by freight trains, like in Duisburg) are one of the most significant and often misunderstood elements in post-industrial territories. Many clients initially view it as a sign of neglect, but for us, it is an indicator of resilience, adaptability, and ecological intelligence. These plants colonize abandoned substrates, tolerate poor soils, and establish the first stages of new ecosystems. They reveal the site’s hidden capacities and often determine the direction of future ecological development.

Of course, intelligent choices need to be made, instead of replacing it entirely, we observe which species are stable, which indicate healthy soil, or which signal contamination. In some cases, we simply guide succession; in others, we introduce new planting to steer long-term development. The goal is not to impose decorative landscaping but to promote resilient ecologies, which represents a fundamental shift from maintenance to stewardship.

This approach was crucial in projects like the Duisburg Nord Landscape Park, where industrial remnants and emerging vegetation coexist in a hybrid environment. Cautious vegetation management allowed spontaneous growth to re-establish itself around the blast furnaces’ monumental structures. The result is a landscape where the “untouched” and the “built” form an archetypal dialogue, where the wild and the tamed coexist without contradiction.

The same philosophy informed our strategy at Parco Dora in Turin, where e.g. in the “Hortus Conclusus” the remains of vast industrial sheds now hold an atmospheric canopy of foliage. Rather than reconstruct the original roof, we allowed vegetation to create a permeable and living ceiling. The resulting spatial experience connects industrial memory with ecological transformation. Working with spontaneous vegetation also means addressing the simultaneous expectations of diverse users. As we observed in projects like *Rulmentul*, different groups — residents, officials, cultural actors, ecologists — imagine the future landscape very differently. The design must respond to all these layers. Ecology in post-industrial sites is never static. It is a dynamic process defined by succession, disturbance, and adaptation. Our role is not to freeze this process but to shape its trajectory.

IPC: *Industrial regeneration is often accompanied by questions of social identity, new uses, and economic transformation. Can architecture meaningfully generate new forms of collective value?*

ID: Absolutely. Social regeneration is inseparable from the transformation of post-industrial landscapes. These sites are never only about structures — they are about identity, memory, and community. We see this in realized projects where former industrial structures now support social programs, such as community workshops, community gardens (as e.g. “Le potager en soie”), green courtyards, and mixed-use developments. When we intervene, we try to ensure that every gesture produces a surplus for people: a benefit for the general public, across all ages, backgrounds, and uses. This commitment shapes our decisions at every scale.

At the same time, we repeatedly observe that when the industrial core is kept, respected, and carefully transformed, it becomes a catalyst for new development. It creates identity, anchors the neighborhood, and gives coherence to emerging uses. In some of our projects, housing, offices, and cultural programs have grown around preserved industrial elements — proof that heritage and investment can reinforce each other.

Across all these contexts, landscape architecture acts as a mediator, negotiating between industrial memory and contemporary needs, between ecological processes and civic life.

IPC: *Your work moves fluidly between different scales, from territorial strategies to construction details. How do these scales interact, and why is a multiscale perspective so essential in post-industrial projects?*

ID: A multiscale approach is fundamental to our practice because industrial landscapes generally operate at multiple scales simultaneously. Their infrastructures extend territorially, their architectures shape urban fragments, and their materials influence micro-ecologies. To work meaningfully in such environments, we must be attentive to all these layers simultaneously.

At the territorial scale, we study how former industrial corridors, rail networks, water systems, and ecological zones intersect. These studies reveal the large-scale structures — sometimes hidden — that determine how a site can evolve. For instance, in Parco Dora or Duisburg Nord, the interplay between water, topography, and former production zones shaped the spatial and ecological backbone of the park.

At the urban scale, we observe how industrial areas connect (or fail to connect) to surrounding neighborhoods. Many such sites were historically isolated by fences, rails, or roads. Regeneration, therefore, often requires stitching them back into the city through green spaces, promenades, bridges, public spaces, and new programs. The *Rulmentul* site is a good example: user expectations range from economic revitalization to cultural programming, ecological restoration, infrastructural and social accessibility. A coherent concept must address all these layers.

At the architectural scale, we study structural frameworks, material remains, and spatial sequences. Preserving a wall or an inner column grid can create a new urban façade or a sheltered courtyard. In the Esplanade TASE project, the remaining shed facades shaped the central public space, allowing us to insert new functions — an urban green island on former mineral ground, a generous promenade with shady places to stay — while maintaining continuity with the industrial past.

And at the most minor scale, the scale of material detail and substrate, we work with soils, rubble, hydrology, and vegetation. These micro-elements determine how the site will behave ecologically and socially. Specific substrates create specific growing conditions; spontaneous colonization tells us where to intervene and where to allow natural processes to continue. Soil, moisture, mineral content — all these guide the emergence of plant communities and influence how people experience the landscape.

Working across scales is not a linear process. We move constantly between them, allowing insights at one scale to influence decisions at another. The result is a design that can withstand long-term transformation. Post-industrial landscapes evolve over decades; therefore, our strategies must be robust enough to absorb change, yet precise enough to give orientation. This multiscale lens also helps mediate between different stakeholders — residents, ecologists, investors, public administrators — each of whom perceives the site at a different perspective. By integrating all these viewpoints, we develop a resilient, layered, and adaptable concept. Ultimately, the multiscale approach enables us to honor the complexity of post-industrial landscapes. It ensures that transformations remain grounded in material reality, ecological processes, historical memory, and social needs — all at once.

IPC: *Looking back, what do you see as the enduring legacy of post-industrial sites? Do they have a pedagogical value for younger generations, and how do you think young architects relate to them today — as opportunities for exploration or as overly complex and challenging environments?*

ID: These sites are indeed very challenging. Working with them requires a strong team, a wide range of competences, and — above all — a clear and resilient concept. A good concept is essential because projects of this scale and complexity often unfold over decades. You may only be able to realize them gradually, step by step, but if you have a long-term vision that you can continuously return to, you will not lose coherence along the way.



Fig. 9: Parco Dora, Turin, Vitali area. Industrial remains as a spatial system

What is important is that such a vision does not impose uniformity. On the contrary, heterogeneity — different architectural responses, forms, and spatial interpretations — is not a contradiction but a potential. (Fig. 9) A strong conceptual framework can accommodate diversity and even encourage it, allowing space for experimentation, new actors, and start-ups to emerge over time.

At the same time, these projects depend on intergenerational collaboration. They require the knowledge of highly experienced professionals — deep technical understanding — combined with creativity, innovation, and ecological knowledge, including plant expertise. In nearly all our projects, innovation emerges precisely from this combination. This complexity, and the exchange between generations and disciplines, is what makes post-industrial sites particularly interesting for young architects. They are demanding, but they are also vibrant learning environments.

IPC: Let us also talk about ethics. Ethics are foundational to any intervention in post-industrial landscapes. These sites are not neutral: they carry memories of labor, exploitation, innovation, environmental impact, and, at times, human suffering. To engage with them means acknowledging both visible and invisible layers of meaning, and responding with responsibility, sensitivity, and integrity.

ID: This responsibility is powerful in places with traumatic histories. Understanding layers also means confronting the emotional dimension of a site. They guide us toward gestures that maintain dignity, authenticity, and continuity. We apply this approach also to other types of projects, as the Mühlendorfer Hart, (Fig. 10) a former forced labor camp, satellite of the Dachau concentration camp. We introduced minimal yet respectful measures — pathways, clearings, and markers that invite reflection without overdefining the space. The goal was not to aestheticize the past but to allow victims and their families a way to access the site with dignity. White markings on the tree trunks indicate the extent of the former roll call square and serve as an understated yet powerful remembrance. Such restrained gestures create spaces where silence, memory, and reflection can coexist.

Ethics also concern the coexistence of what remains untouched and what is newly built. As we have reflected in our concept of “making time visible,” the landscape must be able to hold harmonious and disturbing elements, continuity, and fragmentation. Legacy is not a fixed image, but an evolving relationship between people, material, and place.



Fig. 10: Memorial Place Mühldorfer Hart, Forest Camp. Concrete platforms, seating and white markings on the tree trunks demarcating the extent of the now overgrown roll call ground

Ultimately, shaping legacy means creating continuity — between past and future, between material and ecology, between memory and imagination. Our responsibility is to introduce new uses without destroying the place's intrinsic character. Legacy is not something we impose. It emerges from a careful balance of preservation and transformation. We try to continue the story, to add a new trace and leave space for future generations to find their own meanings. We do not aim to provide definitive answers.

IPC: *No, you pose the right questions. It's more difficult to pose the right questions than to give answers.*

ID: That is also why we are deeply grateful for the legacy of Peter Latz. The Europa Nostra European Heritage Award, which he received for his life's work, is not only a personal recognition but a signal to future generations. It acknowledges the courage to pursue unconventional paths and long-term visions, even when they challenge dominant paradigms.

IPC: *In the end, do you believe that such awards, design competitions, and international recognition can influence the political will?*

ID: We believe strongly in Europe as a shared cultural space, connected through diverse and layered traces. These traces — industrial, cultural, ecological — are fundamental to European identity. Such approaches demonstrate that it is possible to find meaningful, site-specific solutions that respect their complexity. This attitude strengthens both conceptual frameworks and political confidence. Of course, recognition alone is not enough. There must be a political and public will, a starting point. But when visionary concepts and political commitment come together, they can form a strong foundation for long-term, healthy projects. That is what we continue to strive for in our everyday practice.



Fig. 11: Parco Dora, Turin. Industrial remnants define a linear landscape for circulation, leisure, and everyday urban use

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