

Let's imagine the city of tomorrow!

Green city life



a film by Manon Turina & François Marques

Jour2fête production, Dao production and Le Lokal production
present

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Synopsis

How do we build the city of tomorrow?
One that combines the benefits of the countryside
with the advantages of the urban world?
Manon and François, two young city dwellers, traveled
between Mexico, Europe, and the US in search of concrete
and revolutionary initiatives at every scale that bring
nature back to the heart of cities. Accompanied by

associations, business leaders, and city experts, they
provide inspiring ideas to propel cities into the 21st
Century: from revegetation to urban farming and bio-
waste recovery. By establishing the link between all these
solutions, they offer us their vision of what the green city
of tomorrow could be, calling on government, private
companies, and citizens to take action.



Interview

Manon Turina & François Marques



Where did the idea for this documentary come from?

François Marques. In March 2020, when the pandemic hit, Manon and I had been working in London for six months in marketing and management. We loved our jobs, and our hectic city lives. Then, like everyone else, we suddenly found ourselves shut in at home working remotely. With the artifices of a big city — its bars, movie theaters, theaters, and restaurants — all gone, we started to miss nature, and that lack got us thinking.

The coronavirus gave us time for that. What kind of city did we want to live in? What could the city of tomorrow look like?

Manon Turina. Neither François nor I was particularly eco-friendly — we were more in that cliché of people who come out of business school and dream of a life lived at a thousand miles an hour. The city at a standstill forced us to settle down. We started going to parks. We discovered silence whereas the noise and the traffic had never bothered us until then. The pollution was decreasing, animals were wandering the streets, and nature was reclaiming its rights. So, it was possible to live in a city in a way that's harmonious with nature. Maybe there was still time to counter the chaos for which we'd been prepared for so long, or to change it at least. We wanted to move. To act. And so, we immersed ourselves in the solutions scientists were proposing.



You had no experience in the field of filmmaking. What made you decide to choose this path?

F.M. Over the course of our research, we realized that a lot of concrete solutions already existed. Why not go and meet these people who were trying them out and learn alongside them? We weren't thinking about film at all. It was just a personal quest that we hoped would lead to action.

M.T. Google helped us find hundreds of existing initiatives. Then, we deepened our research through books on the subject and by meeting with experts via videoconference. Then, we had to go through everything and separate the really good ideas from the

bad ones — they look great on paper, but their impact turns out to be downright negative once they're implemented. Experts that we'd contacted guided us in our choices — "Don't go to see that, it's too energy-intensive", etc. After that, we followed our instincts.

F.M. After about four months, we selected several cities around the world that were facing specific problems — heat, pollution, noise, water, access to food, waste, human contacts, contact with nature... and proposed solutions imagined by people living there. The most obvious one, which seemed to us to be THE solution and struck us right away at the beginning of lockdown, was to reconnect People, Cities, and Nature. We'd found our subject.

But you weren't yet thinking about making a film?

F.M. Not at that point, no. Manon and I planned to quit our jobs and set off on what was becoming a world tour (albeit limited since the pandemic had driven some countries to close their borders). We were obviously interested in sharing this adventure with as many people as possible. Like all young people today, we were mainly thinking of social media before maybe publishing a book.

M.T. One night, after watching a lot of documentaries on the subject, including “Demain” by Cyril Dion and Mélanie Laurent, François said to me, “We could make a film”. He thought cinema was a powerful way to reach people. The challenge seemed huge and crazy to me. We had no equipment and we'd never filmed before. We just went for it. In September 2020, six months after the beginning of lockdown, we left London and headed for Toulouse, our hometown. François found a three-month training course in filmmaking. I took care of the financing and the preparations for filming. We divided the tasks: he took the technical part, and I took the journalistic one.

At that point, you were on your own, with no producer...

F.M. The producer came later in the adventure. We said: “Let's go for it and we'll see where it takes us...”

M.T. As soon as we got to Toulouse, we launched a crowdfunding campaign and looked for private partners. And we created an association, Dao Production, to contribute to ecological transition via social media or audiovisual content. In traditional Chinese gymnastics, “Dao” means finding balance.

“La Belle Ville / Green City Life” is divided into three chapters. The first, devoted to revegetation, takes us to Mexico where Fernando Ortiz Monasterio has reduced the city's pollution by revegetating pylons lining the roads...”

F.M. What Fernando has imagined – and done – is one of the first experiments that attracted us during our research. What we experienced during the two weeks we spent in Mexico went far beyond our expectations.

M.T. We arrived with sort of a conqueror mindset, sure of finding answers to our questions, and revolutionary projects. We discovered a population that lived at a different pace, with a way of understanding the transition of cities that was completely disconnected from our own. Not only was Mexico testing, on its own scale, a very broad spectrum of solutions around the three themes that concerned us – revegetation, urban farming, and composting – but also everyone, philosophers, researchers, or the average citizen, was involved. The Mexicans are wild about nature. Those people are deeply inspiring, particularly Paco Ayala and Piero Batandiaran from la Huerto Roma Verde.



After Mexico, you set off for Chicago.

F.M. There's a spur-of-the-moment side to this film. We did a lot of things in preparation for the film, but spontaneity also played a role. Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, who revegetated the pylons in Mexico, put us in touch with Rudi Scheuermann who specializes in the design of green building envelopes... In parallel, we made some discoveries...

M.T. Every time we arrived somewhere, the first day was spent discovering the city. When we got to Chicago, we walked around, we went to the very top of the tallest skyscraper and, there, we discovered green roofs everywhere. We'd never imagined that such vegetation could grow like that. We did some research, harassed Chicago City Hall, and came to understand that those roofs were a big thing: Chicago is one of the cities in the world with the largest number of green roofs. We knocked on the door of one of two companies offering that kind of service and that's how we were able to interview Molly Meyer, architect and founder of Omni Eco Systems.

Molly Meyer explains how it's possible to vegetate a roof without running the risk of cracking the building. Everything — fertilizer, support, etc. — seems to be calculated down to the last gram...

M.T. It's true. She uses a mixture of different soils and very light plant shredders that make it possible for the roots to hold even when the trees grow. Her technique, which uses no technology whatsoever, makes it possible to grow actual forests on 100-year-old rooftops.

There is obviously a cost to all of that...

F.M. It's a matter of priority. We now know: the model we've been living in until now has become totally obsolete. It has to be entirely rebuilt.

M.T. And implement these solutions. It's urgent to inspire architects and urban planners, whether they're in their fifties or still at school, to build differently. Everyone must take part in this transformation effort — the private individual on their patio, the collectives through associations, businesses, municipalities... We can no longer systematically blame others. We are all levers of action.

Policies don't always go in this direction. Isn't there too much Utopia in what you're saying?

M.T. We're aware of that. But the initiatives we discovered are concrete; they already exist. Can the projects we're showing last? Hold out financially? One day, in Mexico, while we were confessing our doubts to him, Paco Ayala told us, "The world has always gone through crises — the wood crisis, the oil crisis — but life is here, and people are moving forward. They do so full of pipe dreams that

they pass on to their descendants. From word of mouth, we moved to writing and, today, the internet. It's the same thing. We're in a new period of transition and, once again, it's time for us to use our imaginations." His words gave us comfort. Paco is right: it's vital to create new imaginary worlds, concrete scenarios far from the disaster films we see every day. To act, not suffer.

F.M. We put images, words, and facts to the abstract "sustainable development projects" we hear so much about. Not all of these experiments are perfect. They can be improved. But it's a start. The transition is going to take decades. It's strange to experience. But we can't go on living as we do today, and it's essential to contribute to this transition.

In chapter two, which is devoted to urban agriculture, you talk about tiny forests, the small forests with high biodiversity that can grow in our cities...

M.T. They're small and can be installed everywhere. They make it possible to bring a little green back to cities and create spaces for rest and education.

But these tiny forests get a lot of criticism. They're blamed for causing the deaths of many other trees...

M.T. That's true and, for a long time, we hesitated over working them into Green City Life. However, they can be easily integrated into any city in the world, even the densest since they're the size of a tennis court. For a tiny forest to have a real positive impact on the community, you have to surround yourself with experts and ecologists who really know the territory. Like all broad-scale revegetation projects, they require expertise on the territory for them to be viable and positive.

Another exciting topic in chapter two is the fantasy that would lead cities to be self-sufficient by managing to grow what they consume.

F.M. That was the source of a debate between Manon and me — with her being more on the Utopian side and me much less so — and we had to admit that it was indeed a fantasy. The high-tech projects that grow salads above ground with LED lights and ventilation use a lot of energy and aren't interesting in any way. It's usually these false good ideas that sometimes flourish today. On the other hand, urban agriculture has other roles and benefits that are essential to the transition of cities and, in addition, relocating agriculture around cities by reappropriating the green belts around them would be a real asset.

You also campaign for city residents to familiarize themselves with nature by growing fruits and vegetables on their balconies or windowsills...

F.M. Just seeing nature and farming near them again would raise their awareness of the reality of these professions. People in cities no longer have any idea of the variety of vegetables that exist, much less the time it takes for them to grow. Having fun growing them at home is another way to reconnect with the living world.

M.T. It might seem futile to plant cherry tomatoes, basil and onions in a pot. However, on a micro-scale, while it obviously doesn't allow us to feed ourselves, it does let us understand nature, reconnect to it, and share — to a small degree — the difficulties of the agricultural world. Urban and rural people can't go on walking separate paths. Today, farmers alone bear the burden of feeding the world. They're condemned for using pesticides and rotting the soil but, at the same time, they're encouraged to do it and lower their prices. Isn't it time we decide to support them?

The last chapter of the film deals with composting. We have the feeling this is a familiar concept for most people...

F.M. They know it exists and they support it; but the reality is that, in cities, nothing's happening. One of the aims of the film is precisely to show that it's possible and that it's useless to wait for municipalities to propose a new bin to get started. There are do-it-yourself techniques (without the insects or odors!), and you can also join collectives. In fact, in 2024, a law will officialize the obligation to collect this waste, which accounts for a third of our waste bins and is currently incinerated. Everyone can already act at their own level. Through the journey, we realized that this is just common sense.

In preparing your roadmap, you mentioned having been limited in your options by the countries whose borders had been closed due to the pandemic. Which ones do you regret not having visited?

M.T. Even if we show images of it thanks to an architectural firm that sent us a video, we couldn't go to Singapore. And our biggest regret is not going to Japan, which practices a lot of urban agriculture — especially in Tokyo — and uses very interesting composting techniques. There, nature is present in every corner of the cities despite their density.



You didn't have a producer, and you had no experience in post-production. How did you go about editing?

M.T. We had seventy hours of rushes. After six months of filming, despite the funds raised through crowdfunding and help from a partner — Accord Invest — we were out of money. We thought we'd do it ourselves. Tinker around. We got incredibly lucky: that was when the city of Toulouse, the Occitan region and Crédit Agricole Immobilier agreed to support our project. We had what we needed to pay a team of professionals to work with us. No tinkering!

F.M. As much as we managed our choices, we were able to delegate the technical aspect of this phase. That was reassuring. Jour2Fête, the distributor, came shortly after that. This film really was a fantastic human adventure during filming, post-production, and now distribution.

M.T. Coming out of post-production, we were like crazy people. What we're experiencing now is a dream: we had the ambition to get here but we never thought the dream would become a reality and that the film's messages would be broadcast on such a large scale!

What are your plans now?

M.T. To accompany "Green City Life" for as long as possible to raise awareness among as many people as possible about the transition of cities; to think about new films that convey messages and trigger new imagination. So that, coming out of them, people say to themselves, "I want to be a part of this transition." Today, 75% of us live in cities. It'll be 85% tomorrow. It's urgent.

F.M. Cinema has grabbed us by the guts — we don't want to let it go, but we don't want to forget our goals either! The film we've created was made to inspire and generate the desire to move towards this new imagination. However, it doesn't enable viewers to concretely understand how to duplicate the initiatives in the film in other territories or at home. So, we wanted to share concrete tools so that viewers inspired by the film are supported to take action. To that end, we created a website with action sheets that will be available when the film is released and adapted to each scale of action (action sheets for public institutions, companies, citizens, teachers, and associations). An interactive map will also be available so everyone can identify the projects already in existence in their city, and a forum called "Ma Belle Ville" that will enable everyone to share their projects and achievements.

The Participants

Piero Barandiarán
& Paco Ayala



Founders of “Huerto Roma Verde”, a place in Mexico City devoted to transitioning our cities

In 2012, Huerto Roma Verde was born on a plot of land that had been abandoned for over 27 years. Citizens and social organizations undertook the rehabilitation of this space in the aim to carry out socio-environmental activities and projects to benefit everyone. Huerto Roma Verde is a small oasis located in Mexico City that relies on permaculture and indigenous knowledge. It uses social biology and intuitive knowledge to generate conscious communities that work in favor of their local environment to reduce our footprint and create regenerative models that function for the earth and not against it. For Piero and Paco, we need to create spaces in cities that connect us to the land and can promote self-management of agroecological food by showing us the healing power of plants and the ability that natural and recycled local materials give us to design our habitability. As such, we can co-create a community capable of fostering inclusive relationships that favor sustainable growth in their local environments.

These are gardens of hope because they foster a thought-feeling that’s nurtured by the understanding emerging from systemic understanding and thus enables empathy to start growing in the hearts of those who experience this interconnectedness.

Fernando Ortiz Monasterio



Mexican architect

Rudi Scheuermann



Global Director of Building Envelope Design at Arup

Mexico City has 3.7 square meters of green space per capita whereas the World Health Organization confirms that a number less than 9 can be critical in terms of respiratory diseases. Verde Vertical has set itself the objective of creating the 30 million square meters necessary to recover the city's green spaces by using the existing infrastructure: houses, buildings, urban infrastructure — everything that humans have built. The architect has created more than 100 thousand square meters of green space. The city therefore needs 29 million more to reach this seemingly unattainable objective...

As an architect and engineer, he developed the design of the building envelope and numerous specialized disciplines including building physics, fire protection, materials, and the lighting and acoustic design in our German office. He focuses on the multidisciplinary design of energy efficient and sustainable building envelopes. Rudi Scheuermann studied architecture at the University of Karlsruhe before conducting a research study in Bath, England, with a master's degree in membrane construction architecture. He has worked for architectural and engineering firms in Germany, The Netherlands, Great Britain, and the United States.

Maurice Maggi



Writer and defender of urban nature

Maurice Maggi was born and lives in Zurich. Known as “the wild gardener” or the “guerilla chef”, he sows everywhere he can in the city and in secret, and harvests all the wild plants he comes across to take them back to his kitchen... A confirmed landscaper, he has spent over 20 years carrying out “green guerilla” actions, gardening on unused surfaces to make them more beautiful. He has always promoted the development and design of “urban nature”.

Molly Meyer



Founder of Omni Ecosystems

Molly Meyer, a biochemist trained at Stanford University and CEO of Omni Ecosystems and Rooftop Green Works in Chicago, is part of the next generation of innovators in the green roof sector. Ms. Meyer’s approach in terms of green roof design places emphasis on affordability and simplicity, to maximize biodiversity. Through her sister companies, Meyer sells and installs a system of green roof trays specially designed to accommodate exceptionally diverse plant species in a shallow growing environment, namely in veneer prairies.

Tine Vanfraechem



Former Project Manager at Good Planet

Tine works on the implantation and animation of “Tiny Forests” in Belgium. A Tiny Forest® is a dense indigenous forest the size of a tennis court. This forest is a pleasant place not only for butterflies, birds, bees, and small mammals, but also for humans. Children can learn about Belgian nature in an outdoor setting. And residents can meet in a nice, healthy place.

Philippe Clergeau



Urban Ecology Consultant

Philippe Clergeau is a Professor of Ecology at the National Natural History Museum. His research in urban ecology focuses on the construction of urban biodiversity and, more specifically, the role of landscape organization in animal dispersion. He works on the relationship with ecology and planning on different scales, particularly the implementation of green screens in urban projects. He also specializes in the behaviors and management of invasive species. Philippe Clergeau has been a consultant in urban ecology and territorial ecology since the end of 2011. His goal is to integrate functional biodiversity as an engine of sustainable urban planning.

Valérie Tsimba



Writer, city resident, defender of the edible garden

Valery Tsimba wants to encourage the practice of gardening in the city at a time when everyone is dreaming of having a little corner vegetable garden. A city resident herself, Valérie Tsimba works at La Défense and is a true gardening enthusiast. She devotes her free time to roaming the communal gardens of the Parisian suburbs, bartering seeds, and organizing workshops for children. From her little plot of land in a shared garden to her balcony, Valérie extols the virtues of permaculture for creating abundance. In fact, Valérie fed herself almost entirely from her balcony harvests during lockdown! What could be better than eating what you've grown yourself?

Marco Claussen



Philosopher, Co-founder of “Nomadic Green” and “Prinzessinnengarten”

Along with Robert Shaw, Marco Clausen founded the non-profit organization “Nomadisch Grün” (Nomadic Green), which aims to transform abandoned urban spaces into social and ecological gardens. He is the co-initiator of Prinzessinnengarten: a place devoted to urban agriculture, environmental learning, and neighborhood participation on the Moritzplatz in Berlin-Kreuzberg. Marco Claussen has organized several workshops and thematic events on city nutrition, youth participation, urban resilience, and urban agriculture in the European context. Through conferences, publications, and networking, he is contributing to the question of how our cities will face the challenges of the future.

Daniel Dermitzel



Coordinator at Prinzessinnengarten

Daniel Dermitzel is a philosopher-gardener. In his view, humans are in conflict with the Earth. Taking care of the Earth is a step toward the resolution of this conflict. Reaching out to the land is a practice that consists of working together, mindfully, in vegetable gardens or on small farms. It is healing practice that can help us to recognize the many wounds we inflict on the Earth, acknowledge that we are a part of nature, and fall back in love with Mother Earth.

Guillaume Morel



Landscape Engineer, Urban Agriculture Researcher, author of *Agriculteurs Urbains*

His passion for the city and nature naturally led him to orient his professional career towards the revegetation of the city and its buildings, integrating ecological, technical, and aesthetic dimensions. He worked in the United States and Singapore designing green roofs before coming to France to spend eight years working in landscape architecture firms. His years-long passion for the innovative domain of urban agriculture led him to co-design participatory production sites in his public space development projects. Since 2015, he has been in charge of urban agriculture for ASTREDHOR and oversaw the writing of *Agriculteurs Urbains* for Editions France Agricole.

Nicolas Brassier



Director at Peas & Love

For Nicolas, urban agriculture plays an essential role in raising city residents' awareness of their environment and the quality of what they eat and promotes the desire to consume local products. "The goal, in my opinion, isn't to feed cities but rather to give the population access to the agricultural world and its invaluable professions, which have been mistreated by urbanization."

Enzo Favoino



President of Zero Waste Europe

Enzo Favoino is a technical expert and a researcher at the Scuola Agraria del Parco di Monza, with decades of experience in selective collection, recycling, composting and prevention. Mr. Favoino is also an expert in European waste legislation and an invaluable resource for European policy making. He is one of the founders of the European Composting Network and the coordinator of the scientific committee at the Zero Waste Research Center in Italy.

Ken Dunn



Founder of the Resource Center

In 1972, Ken founded the Resource Center, a non-profit organization offering programs that include a service that transforms restaurant waste into compost for its mobile City Farm plots. Ken collects compost from all over the city; his weekly tour in the West Loop also includes The Publican, City Winery, and other companies. The farmers from Ken's City Farm then use the compost to clean up the soil and grow herbs and vegetables. He is bridging the gap between urban farms and city composting.

Anouck Barcat



Former Director of Public Affairs at Upcycle
and former President of AFAUP

Committed to ecological transition, Anouck Barcat invests all her energy in projects that deliver quick, powerful impacts and contribute to accelerating change. After 15 years abroad, she has spent the last 8 years in France immersing herself in CSR networks, peasant agriculture, circular economy and, most importantly, urban agriculture and composting. These sectors are creating immense added value — social, environmental, and economic — and squaring the circle!

Corinne Escoffier



Founder of Les Créatures Terriennes association

Les Créatures Terriennes (The Earth Creatures) enables mutual aid to easily start apartment composting based on a little-known method of Japanese origin. People practicing this method exchange advice and meet — preferably just next door!

Florian & Delphine



Members of the Truillot Shared Garden association

All of this association’s activities — before, during, and after composting — are a chance to collectively experience a new way of life, camped in its urban environment, but that unfolds to the rhythm of the earth and the seasons. Everyone takes part, with what they are and what they like to do. In addition to compost from the rue Lacharrière, the Truillot Shared Garden consists of several plots to garden in order to transform the public space and decrease the temperature in our district, which is the densest and least green in Paris, and therefore the warmest. Florian and Delphine give us a 360° tour of the gardening and composting activities as city residents. A hopeful urban movement and a model to duplicate — that is what they are proposing for “Green City Life” of tomorrow.



Credits

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