

Research Article

The Moving Ground Project: An Analysis Of A Case That Promotes Nature.

Niolas Anasdesopoulos, Peneope Ilikou and Miela Nestoa.

University, Parasi-33007, NEPAL.

Abstract

The Isadora and Raymond Duncan Dance Research Center (DDRC) launched the year-long MOVING GROUND project (MG), which is the subject of this study. By bringing the idea of a garden both practically and figuratively, the Duncan Dance Research Center hopes to inspire the artistic community and transform the perspectives of the local community while addressing climate change challenges that intersect the social, physical, and artistic domains. The long-term objective of the DDRC is to serve as a concrete model that may be experienced and duplicated in its entirety or in sections inside the city or elsewhere by gradually changing its grounds, infrastructure, and social fabric.

Keywords : *net-positive design; nature-positive development; regenerative design; degrowth; nature-based solutions.*

INTRODUCTION

Context

Part of the larger metropolitan conglomeration of Athens, Greece, the Isadora and Raymond Duncan Dance Research Center (DDRC) is a historic location that is owned by the municipality of Byron. Isadora Duncan and her brother Raymond Duncan launched it in 1903. The Duncans were greatly influenced by classical Greek culture. Because of her then-radical break from the traditional ballet tradition, Isadora Duncan is largely regarded as the creator of modern dance [1]. The DDRC's location was selected due to its then-dominant view of the Saronic Gulf and the Acropolis. It was claimed that Agamemnon's Palace at Mycenae served as the model for Raymond's adoption of the building's austere features. The area surrounding the DDRC belongs to three municipalities (Byron, Hymettus, and Athens), all of which followed the typical Athenian development model that roughly took place between 1960 and the late 90s, characterized by incremental, privately funded residential construction with the absence of urban planning. Public infrastructure generally comes too late, only to give basic services to new construction in neighborhoods by providing access to water, electricity grid and sewage networks. The 16,000 m² of Duncan grounds were reduced to 1500 m² during the course of the last 120 years due to urban sprawl around the city center. Additionally,

the direct view of the Acropolis was impeded by multi-story apartment buildings, which until 2010 continued to displace one- or two-story residences. The building structure was acknowledged as a monument of architectural and historical significance in 1984. The old structure that now houses the DDRC has most of its original features left. Following major renovations carried out in 1986 under the sponsorship of the Byron municipality, the DDRC was formed as a contemporary dance center that serves the local community as well as the professional dance community. The European Dancehouse Network (EDN) includes the DDRC.

The Greek Ministry of Culture provided funding for the experimental interdisciplinary project MOVING GROUND (MG), which was started by the DDRC. Through a number of short-, medium-, and long-term initiatives, MOVING GROUND aimed to address the microclimate of the region surrounding the DDRC, promote ecological awareness, and develop active citizenry. According to this paradigm, MG was created as a study hypothesis that would look at how its methodology—discussed here—has affected the DDRC's facilities, grounds, and communities. It would speak to both the local community and the dancing community. The artistic director of the Duncan Center oversaw the general concept and design of the MG project, which was carried out by an interdisciplinary team made up of two choreographers, one visual artist, two architects, and a local filmmaker. The curatorial team decided to focus on the human element as the primary motivator for

***Corresponding Author:** Niolas Anasdesopoulos, University, Parasi-33007, NEPAL.

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all modification and adaptation plans.

Locals, dancers, choreographers, students, architects, researchers, artists, botanists, permaculture educators, scientists, teachers, and individuals of all ages from the Municipality of Byron and beyond were all involved in MG during its lifetime. By examining the cycles of nature and emphasizing its presence in an urban environment, the project's initial phase aimed to discover and record the typology of its grounds and landscape. In order to do this, a number of initiatives were started with the goal of restoring the diminished ecology surrounding the center by concentrating on the soil, plants, landscape features, and general surroundings. At the same time, a number of group initiatives that improved the local community's quality of life and promoted cooperative connections promoted the people's active participation and involvement. As a visionary who challenged the effects of modern society, Raymond Duncan is regarded today. He chose a frugal lifestyle in an attempt to put his ideals into effect, likely motivated by similar movements taking place in other parts of the US and Europe. He lived his entire life upholding the values of self-control and personal labor over mass manufacturing [2]. These ideas are still relevant today and serve as motivation for reconsidering the physical environment, the direction of modern artistic production techniques, and Western culture in general. The DDRC once again discusses community development, active engagement, the green transition, and modest living in honor of its founder through the MG project. Because of its location and the way it has developed, Athens, the setting for the DDRC, is particularly vulnerable to the effects of the climate crisis. It has seen extreme weather phenomena, prolonged heat waves during the summer, torrential rains and flooding more frequently, and severe heat island effects. Addressing this pressing issue holistically through the array of interventions implemented has been a major objective of the MG project throughout all of its phases [3].

Fundamental Ideas

This project's primary objective was to investigate the key ideas and tenets of permaculture and apply them to various levels, such as the community's social fabric and the DDRC's physical grounds (Table 1). Together with the twelve principles of practice [4,5], the three core Permaculture ethical principles of "Earth care, People care, and Share the Surplus" served as the foundation for the MOVING GROUND project, encouraging regenerative design elements and new behavioral patterns that had a positive influence. The project also addressed sustainable development aims: the protection, restoration, and promotion of the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, combat decertification, reversing land degradation, and halting biodiversity loss (15); action to

combat climate change and its effects (13); sustainable cities (11); and sustainable patterns of consumption and production (12). However, because the SDG targets and indicators are based on contentious economic measures from the 20th century, such as GDP, MG believed that they were frequently weak, ineffectual, and/or contradictory, in keeping with positive development theory. The foundation of positive development theory is the belief that human creations, particularly those involving physical and institutional design, are capable of much more than just reducing the damage caused by urbanization or achieving zero energy: they can and must reduce planetary overshoot by enhancing biodiversity, ecosystems, and nature. By using a net-positive development method that gives back to the community and the environment more than it takes, both in terms of the life cycle (time) and the entire system (space), the MG project aimed to draw attention to these flaws.

MOVING GROUND aims to address the physical grounds at different stages (short, mid, and long term) through a series of interventions that take place in whole system and life cycle terms. While acknowledging the time, money, labor, and other resources needed, these interventions are also anticipated to naturally arise from a process of gradual transformation of participants' mindsets. Nature-based Solutions (NbS) which are defined as: "Actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously specifically helpful when applied on urban centers that could contribute to adapting and mitigating the effects of climate change [8,9]. For both short- and long-term approaches to addressing water security and scarcity, the NbS toolset was examined.

Techniques

Four interrelated pillars—dance, space, community, and education—formed the framework of MOVING GROUND. These four pillars were equally and concurrently addressed and developed.

Their combination was intended to promote rhizomatic growth and integrate sustainability into daily operations.

In keeping with many institutions worldwide, the DDRC decided to challenge artists to develop concepts, initiatives, and activities that increase ecological awareness in order to bring the art scene up to speed with the pressing issues of the day. This is because the devastating effects of climate change are becoming more frequent and intense, and there is an increasing need for pertinent action. In order to produce ideas for artistic and educational programs, artists of various ages, levels of expertise, and artistic practices were asked to consider their needs, interests, and energy use habits in respect to the four pillars of MG.

The removal of trash and rubble used to build a mandala and the first stages of establishing a community garden marked the beginning of a slow restoration effort of the abandoned grounds. Participation in a number of workshops and events was encouraged and extended to the inhabitants. Lastly, courses were created to cater to a range of ages and needs, and professionals were asked to present workshops and presentations to engage the public.

Numerous initiatives that emphasize the value of diversity, cooperation, interdependence, observation, and care have already been undertaken; these are mostly extremely simple and require little to no investment. They were a component of the short-term plan, which runs parallel to the MOVING GROUND project's one-year length. A three-year mid-term plan and a six to ten-year long-term plan will replace the MG strategy, which focused on interacting with the communities and the first stages of redeveloping the DDRC's immediate surrounds. The long-term objective is for the DDRC's operations to gradually transition to transformative, regenerative artistic practices and infrastructure solutions that are in line with the pressing environmental, social,

pandemic. Numerous projects and collectivities targeting various facets of life have emerged since 2009. Nonetheless, maintaining community involvement is difficult due to a pervasive skepticism of institutions and common causes that is primarily ingrained in Greek society. People tend to maintain their personal backyard, balcony, and even the sidewalk in front of their door, but they find it difficult to go from the private to the public sphere, especially when it comes to the common areas. Good experiences in the community enable people to

IMPORTANT EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Over the course of the MG project's twelve months, numerous initiatives and occasions took place. The following were a few of the most pertinent occasions that described the methods used:

A workshop on Permaculture (teaching theory and practice by Tina Lymperis). As a first step toward shared care and teamwork, the program taught participants about permaculture and had them plant seasonally suitable nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum majus*) throughout the Duncan Center.

Bram van Oberbeeke's discourse on permaculture. The discussion provided perspectives on how to apply permaculture principles and the permaculture approach to collectives or groups centered on cooperation and efficient planning. Tannya Pico Parra, an Ecuadorian architect and researcher who is a PhD candidate in Urban Development and Governance at Erasmus University Rotterdam's Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, gave a talk on nature-based solutions. The talk provided insights into relatively easy methods that use natural processes to create more resilient and livable urban environments.

Manos Bazanis, Nikos Valcanos, and Vangelis Skoufakis conducted a flora identification and arboretum project that exposed nature's adaptive mechanisms while addressing the traits of urban plants that are typically unseen and dismissed as weeds.

The Earth Organization NGO's training on creating a communal composting unit taught how to create compost that the local population may use locally and feed and care for. The generated compost is already being utilized in the garden and can help the municipality and its residents.

Vasilis Ntouros and Dora Zoumba arranged a workshop on plant nurseries where they offered seeds and methods for growing plants from seed to residents. After learning how to grow plants from seeds, workshop attendees were urged to bring some of their homegrown plants back to the recently created community garden.

The Following Provides A Detailed Explanation Of The Four Moving Ground Pillars

Garden Designing

The classical Athens monuments and the Acropolis' drawings from the 18th century show a barren and dry landscape that stretches as far as the eye can see over the horizon. Raymond Duncan selected Kopanas Hill because it had a clear visual connection to the Acropolis; nevertheless, this benefit was overwhelmed by the subsequent discovery. Water was not available at the location. In the end, the self-sustaining village Raymond had envisioned became untenable due to aridity. Later, in 1935, when the location had been abandoned and the region was quickly growing in population, Aridity, erosion, and the impoverished topsoil of the slope's remnants—which, as a result of fast urbanization, have been split up into pieces of property owned by various entities and sliced by roads—are some of the characteristics that still define Kopanas Hill today. These factors frequently contribute to the unfavorable conditions that define the Mediterranean climate. As a result, the Mediterranean landscape has changed to accommodate a unique ecology made up of plants that can endure in poor soil and have adapted to the summer's dry months (Figure 1a,b). Changing the barren and neglected grounds surrounding the Duncan Center has proven to be a physical task.

leading to active engagement (Figure 5a,b). In recent years, Greece has had a number of crises. A social and political crisis broke out in 2009, and it was followed by an economic crisis in 2011, a refugee crisis in 2015, and the 2020 coronavirus

FINDINGS AND ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

In September 2022, the MOVING GROUND project concluded its first year cycle. In November of the same year, a celebration was conducted to provide a chance to evaluate the results.

The experiences and learning objectives were numerous and varied. The audiences, artists, and participants were equally varied. The initiative implemented a course of action that took into account the seasonal cycle during the twelve-month MG period. Reaching out, working together, resolving disputes and handling emergencies, developing resourcefulness, and negotiating access to resources (land, water, and materials) with different stakeholders—including the public water company and municipality, among others—were the first steps. New forms of artistic creativity broadened the dance community's horizons, leading to hybrid initiatives that encompassed dance workshops, get-togethers, public discussions, promenades, hands-on handicraft, making, and gardening. These projects offer a fresh perspective on how artistic endeavors might more effectively address the environmental issues of biodiversity loss and the climate crisis. In collaboration with the local community and schools in nearby towns, a variety of age-appropriate teaching initiatives were put into place to increase knowledge of water management and responsible resource management.

The center spread awareness of permaculture, sustainability, net-positive ethics, and nature-based solutions across a variety of audiences through educational events that imparted theoretical information and practical activities. The development, use, and upkeep of a communal garden marked a slow but noticeable change in the DDRC's physical grounds. Long-standing behavioral patterns and habits were changed, and the place's distinct spirit (*genius loci*) was reinforced. Additionally, a sharp rise in biodiversity was seen in the months that followed the planting of the vegetable and herbal gardens, as the area has been drawing a variety of insects and birds, providing both visual and olfactory delights. Furthermore, physical alterations that start to transform the atmosphere of a barren urban wasteland into a much-needed, The newly created communal garden inspired people of all ages and backgrounds to get involved in its upkeep and care. This engagement might have inspired them to consider using such techniques in their local communities. The experience of concurrently monitoring and coordinating actions addressing the four pillars of the transdisciplinary MG project helped to build intricate relationships between the personal, social, and environmental domains. By presenting ideas of degrowth in accordance with Raymond Duncan's principles, the local community was made aware of sustainable everyday practices and encouraged to embrace a mindset of belonging, active involvement, and mindful consumption. The relationships made between dance practices' corporeal and physical

elements as a result of permaculture The EDN Atelier (Figure 6) was held at the DDRC throughout the project time, greeting the EDN European Network on June 1 and 2, 2022. Through a prolonged process of nontraditional sharing and learning that spread the MG learning outcomes, the event was created with the intention of encouraging participants to reevaluate their own artistic and everyday practices in dance centers and communities around Europe [16]. Several student proposals were produced over the project's duration because the Duncan Center was used as a case study in two classes at the National Technical University of Athens' School of Architecture. Numerous discussions about climate change, community involvement, permaculture, and nature-based solutions were made possible by these academic events.

RECOGNITIONS

Penelope Iliaskou, Director of the DDRC, is part of the curatorial team for MOVING GROUND. Costume designer Mariela Nestora. Kotsalou is a dancer and choreographer from Vitoria. Architect Dimitris Theodoropoulos, community artist Christina Katsari, film director and community animator Monika Vaxevari, and NTUA professor and architect Nicholas Anastasopoulos. Gigi Argyropoulou, an arts researcher and curator, Fay Zika, an associate professor of philosophy and art theory at the Department of Art Theory and History of Art at the Athens School of Fine Art, and Elena Gogou, a permaculturist, for their motivational keynote addresses at the EDN Atelier event. Thank you to Anastasio Koukoutas and Betina Panagiotara for the enlightening report. To the MG artists Dora Zoumba, Vasilis Ntouro, Iris Nikolaou, Vassiliki Tsangari, Katerina Delakoura, Mariela Nestora, Zoi Dimitriou, Anastasia Polychronidou, Anastasia Barka, Sonia Ntova, Maria Papadopoulou, Vera Karavakou, Despoina Hatzipavlidou, Anthi Mouriadou, Loukiani Papadaki, Elton Petri, Chara Kotsali, Candy Carra, Yannis Tsigris, Mina Anadou, Iro Vassalou, Dimitra Mitropoulou, Dimitra Mertzani, Pavlos Simatis, Stella Tripolitaki, Eugenia Demeglio, Thanos Polymeneas, and every individual who took part in the EDN Atelier program on June 1 and 2, 2022. Every single person in the neighborhood who helped with the Moving Ground project and still does so by maintaining the garden and taking part in charitable activities that benefit the Duncan Center over the years.

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