

Dissertation Synopsis

Architectural Responsibility Beyond the Site: Integrating Wildlife into Urban Environments

To what extent are architects responsible beyond the site in relation to wildlife integration into urban spaces?

Introduction

Modern urban environments are shaped by anthropocentric design, resulting in the exclusion and fragmentation of local ecologies. This reinforces a boundary between urban and natural systems, limiting interaction between human and non-human species. Urban spaces can instead be understood as interconnected systems in which human and ecological processes coexist. Within this framework, architecture shapes environmental conditions, yet its responsibility is often limited to the project site. This research argues that architects have broader agency within urban ecological systems, and that their interventions can exert cumulative effects beyond the site. Accordingly, this study investigates the extent of architectural responsibility for facilitating wildlife integration at the urban scale.

Aims and Objectives

This research examines the extent to which architects are responsible for supporting wildlife integration beyond the project site. It analyses how architectural design can contribute to multi-species urban systems by defining responsibility, evaluating ecological strategies, and assessing the cumulative effects of interventions. The study also identifies the practical and systemic constraints shaping their implementation.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology, combining case study analysis with a review of architectural and urban theory. The selected case studies address ecological integration across different scales. Bosco Verticale exemplifies the incorporation of vegetation and habitat (Boeri, 2014), while the High Line illustrates a broader urban ecological intervention (Corner, 2014). Banff Wildlife Crossings provides insight into system-level infrastructure. Together, these enable comparative analysis of architectural influence beyond the individual site (Clevenger and Huijser, 2011).

Literature Context

Recent scholarship explores the relationship between urban design and ecological systems. Timothy Beatley promotes biophilic cities (Beatley, 2011), while Kate Orff emphasises design engagement with ecological

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processes (Orff, 2016). However, such work often operates at urban or landscape scale, overlooking the cumulative influence of architectural interventions. Earlier theorists such as Jane Jacobs instead prioritised human-centred urban experience. This research positions itself by examining the agency of architects in contributing to ecological systems beyond the site.

Core Argument / Discussion Focus

Architects influence environmental conditions through decisions relating to form, materiality, and spatial organisation, often extending beyond the site in unintended ways. When directed towards ecological integration, architecture can support wildlife within urban environments. Strategies such as vegetation integration, habitat incorporation, and ecological corridors demonstrate this potential. However, individual interventions are limited in scale. Their significance lies in their cumulative effect; when applied across multiple projects, they can contribute to broader ecological networks (Mostafavi and Doherty, 2010). Architecture therefore operates not as isolated objects, but as interlinked elements within a larger urban system capable of supporting multi-species coexistence.

Limitations and Constraints

Architectural responsibility beyond the site is constrained by planning regulations, economic pressures, and client priorities. Procurement models such as design-and-build can limit design control, often prioritising efficiency over ecological considerations. Furthermore, architects have limited influence over wider urban infrastructure and long-term ecological management. There is also a risk that ecological strategies are applied superficially, resulting in greenwashing rather than meaningful integration.

Ethical Considerations

This research raises minimal ethical concerns, as it is based primarily on secondary sources. However, it engages with broader ethical questions regarding the balance between human needs and ecological systems within urban environments.

Timeframe

Term 1 will focus on literature review and refinement of the research question, alongside selection of case studies. Term 2 will involve detailed analysis and development of the argument. Term 3 will be dedicated to writing, editing, and refinement of the dissertation.

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Word Count: 527

References

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4. Mostafavi, M. and Doherty, G. (2010) *Ecological Urbanism*. Baden: Lars Müller Publishers.
5. Orff, K. (2016) *Toward an Urban Ecology*. New York: Monacelli Press.
6. Boeri, S. (2014) *Bosco Verticale*. Milan: Stefano Boeri Architetti.