Alter-Places Final Event
at La Station - Gare des Mines (Paris)
24, 25 & 26 April 2025

Day 1 – April 24

This day opened the Paris workshop with two key moments. The morning was dedicated to a discussion on The Transformation of Alternative Cultural Places (ACPs) Over Time, addressing the strategies and challenges involved in ensuring their long-term sustainability. In the afternoon, attention turned inward with a collective Alter-Places Project Evaluation, offering space to reflect on the journey so far and to outline possible directions and actions for the next steps of the project.

Day 2 & Day 3 - April 25 & 26: *SUSTAIN-ABLE?* Conference

The grand finale of the Creative Europe Alter-Places project, an event envisioned as a critical celebration of Alternative Cultural Places (ACPs) bringing together diverse voices to explore ACPs' sustainability issues, ecological transition and their role in building resilient and creative urban environments. The 2nd and 3rd journey featured an eclectic mix of key notes, workshops, performances, sensible restitution, prototype testing and dj sets - all grounded in the findings of an 18-months European project mixing research and uniting ACPs across Europe.

The Transformation of Alternative Cultural Places Over Time: The Trajectory of La Station – Gare des Mines

La Station — Gare des Mines, built on a former coal station at Porte d'Aubervilliers (Paris), has been a hub for alternative music, visual & sound arts, and social initiatives since 2016. It hosts concerts, club nights, and collaborations with independent labels, festivals, and LGBTQIA+ collectives. Its underground studios support artists in residence, while Station Station, its webradio, explores aesthetic and societal issues through interviews, documentaries, and workshops.

La Station – Gare des Mines offers a vivid example of how an Alternative Cultural Place evolves within, and often in resistance to, shifting urban, social, economic and political conditions. Over two decades, it has proved to be resilient as it has moved through several phases that reflect a broader tension between grassroots experimentation and institutional recognition, between precarious occupation and the search for sustainability.

The project began in the early 2000s with what might be called an aesthetic of marginality and a DIY economy. From 2002 to 2005, the collective projects in areas like Goutte d'Or, engaging with abandoned or underused spaces to develop collective artistic sound interventions. This period, marked by spontaneity and a DIY ethos, was driven by a search for new cultural forms emerging outside the institutional mainstream. The work focused not on permanence, but on experimentation and underground energy.

By 2005, these activities started to coalesce into more defined formats. A growing interest in documenting the emerging music and visual scenes led to the "Filming the Music" phase, where audiovisual production became a means of asserting presence and aesthetic agency in the urban fabric. Despite these developments, structural support from cultural policy remained minimal, and the visual arts in particular were undervalued in local programming.

Between 2007 and 2015, a pivotal transition occurred with the founding of La Station - Gare de Mines. The collective won a grant to occupy a space owned by the national rail company SNCF. This marked the beginning of La Station's gradual consolidation, moving from informal gatherings to semi-permanent programming. It was during this period that the space began to anchor itself within the Porte Aubervilliers area. Public authorities began to tentatively recognize the value of artist-run initiatives, initiating support schemes such as artist residencies. However, this acknowledgment was often ambivalent, emerging alongside increasing municipal interest in gentrification.

The next phase, from 2016 to 2020, saw the full activation of La Station - Gare des Mines at La Porte d'Aubervilliers. It became not only a space for music and artistic experimentation but also a public site of dialogue, resistance, care of minorities and collective imagination. This expansion coincided with mounting urban pressures as major redevelopment projects accelerated in the area.

Notably, the collective sought to address one of the area's most pressing needs by opening a day care center for young migrants. Through this initiative, the project affirmed its social dimension and began diversifying its activities, from cultural to social, in order to respond to and reflect the needs of the surrounding urban area.

This period also included a critical rupture: the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis severely disrupted programming, forcing the collective to pause and reassess its long-term goals and structure.

Finally, between 2021 and 2022, La Station entered a phase of consolidation and a new building was activated: Station Nord. This moment was shaped by the urgent need to secure its place in a rapidly transforming urban landscape. No longer operating only on the margins, the project faced the dual challenge of preserving its identity while navigating the expectations of funders, planners, and local authorities. In response, it adopted a strategy of reassertion: articulating a vision of La Station not just as an art venue, but as a political and social necessity, a space for creation, experimentation, and inclusive cultural place.

During 2022 and 2025 the Station continued to diversify its activities fostering community engagement through initiatives like Le Jardin de La Station, which promotes urban farming and biodiversity awareness, La Bricole, which offers DIY design solutions and upcycling workshops to offer reinsertion for people who have been long term unemployed.

Across all these phases, La Station has demonstrated remarkable adaptability. Its trajectory reveals how ACPs are shaped by and shape the ecologies around them. This history is not linear or programmatic but rather unfolds through negotiation, rupture, and reinvention. In this sense, La Station - Gare des Mines stands as both a cultural actor and a critical lens through which to read the possibilities and perils of sustaining ACPs over time.

Today's issues of sustainability at La Station - Gare des Mines

As the urban landscape shifts, La Station faces growing challenges in spatial management, economic sustainability, and governance. The project must adapt to these evolving constraints while ensuring continuity, as its founders prepare to transfer their knowledge and leadership. This transition marks a critical phase in maintaining La Station's artistic vitality and social mission, requiring collective effort to sustain its role as a space for experimentation, collaboration, and community engagement.

Project Challenges : Development, Identity, and Economic Model

1. Project Development & Identity

Conceptual Ambiguity: There is ongoing difficulty in clarifying the project's identity, which fluctuates between different models such as SMAC (Scènes des Musiques Actuelles), independent national scenes, and Third Places each implying different cultural, political, and operational frameworks.

Governance Continuity: Ambiguity remains in the governance structure, particularly due to the legacy of the previous iteration of the project. Past decisions and structures continue to influence current operations, creating inertia or confusion.

Activist Dimension: A key challenge is reaffirming the project's militant and critical roots in a context of growing institutionalization and local integration. The tension between activist values and institutional requirements is important.

Leadership Transition: The recent change in leadership raises concerns about the consistency of vision and the handover process. This shift affects both internal team dynamics and external perception.

Communication: There is a need to clearly articulate and promote the new direction of the project, both to partners and the public, to prevent misunderstandings and preserve its cultural relevance.

2. Economic Model

Funding and Partnerships: A sustainable financial model is yet to be secured. The search for new resources and partnerships is ongoing, and critical to the project's viability. This includes diversifying income streams while maintaining autonomy and values.

3. Governance (internal and external)

Democratic Practices: The project requires more inclusive and collegial decision-making processes. Strengthening internal and external governance mechanisms through regular consultation and participatory structures is essential for legitimacy and resilience.

Alter-Places' project evaluation
with all the partners
at Campus Condorcet

1 Successes

Strong partner cooperation and mutual learning
The consortium functioned with high engagement and trust, facilitating mutual support, inspiration, and knowledge exchange across diverse local contexts.

Development of a shared understanding of sustainability in ACPs
One of the most significant achievements was co-developing a context-specific definition of sustainability, distinct from EU policy interpretations. For partners, sustainability came to mean access to space, survival, autonomy, and resilience, rather than narrowly ecological measures.

Prototypes and collaborative creation
Creating prototypes (tarot deck, garden systems, mobile projects) provided tangible outputs and served as a bonding tool among partners. These shared practices emphasized doing together over theorizing, aligning with the everyday work of cultural practitioners.

Local impact and reactivation
The project reinvigorated local scenes by bringing new energy, networks, and opportunities for visibility. This translated into reactivated programs and fresh approaches to sustainability at the local level.

Integration of research and practice
Participants valued the synergy between researchers and practitioners. Unlike in many projects, the integration felt natural and respectful, enhancing both analytical depth and practical application.

Communication and coordination
Despite trust among partners, managing communication across such a wide and diverse network was difficult. Some internal teams struggled to integrate the project into already overloaded schedules.

2 Challenges

Prototyping: ambiguity, time, and skills
The process of defining, designing, and building prototypes was conceptually and logistically demanding. There were different understandings of what prototypes should be: conceptual, technical, or applicable and limited time to test them. Moreover, the prototypes often required very specific skill sets (e.g. architecture, design) not evenly distributed among partners.

Uneven partner capacity and experience
Variations in experience with EU-funded projects meant that some partners were more prepared to manage expectations and outputs than others. This created imbalances in responsibility and participation.

Ambiguity around ecological goals
Although ecology was in the project's title, the focus on ecological practices remained vague. Many ACPs prioritized social sustainability, and the survey designed to assess ecological aspects was widely seen as a difficult mismatched in method and content.

Dissemination and visibility gaps
Project outputs, including videos and online tools were underused due to limited staffing, weak communication strategy, and lack of dedicated resources for social media. The results were not always effectively shared within partners' own organizations, let alone externally.

3
Insights and Recommen-dations

Build time for trust and clarity
Participants highlighted the need for more time to build shared language and frameworks before delivering outputs. The metaphor used was "building the tracks while driving the train."

Focus on applicability and replication
Future prototypes should balance conceptual and practical dimensions. Testing them, even minimally, would help assess their potential for replication and adaptation by other ACPs.

Leverage existing networks
Alter-Places was born out of the Trans Europe Halles ecosystem. Formalizing this as a sub-network or community of practice would ensure its legacy and help secure future funding and visibility.

Streamline and focus
Narrowing the thematic scope could deepen impact. Instead of broad engagement with many challenges, future projects could assign a distinct focus (e.g. access to space, legal frameworks) per partner to allow for more targeted prototyping and knowledge sharing.

Reframe dissemination as cultural work
Dissemination should be embedded in the creative process, not treated as an afterthought. Social media should be resourced properly, and outputs should reflect the aesthetic and activist values of ACPs to resonate with wider publics.

Rethink survey and data strategies
Quantitative tools must be better tailored to the ACP context. Future data collection efforts should reflect the lived realities and priorities of participants and avoid overly academic or policy-driven approaches.

Next steps and advocacy
Proposals included moving one prototype into a pilot phase, building legal and financial support tools (e.g. access to lawyers), and reinforcing ACP advocacy by sharing findings with local governments and cultural policymakers.

SUSTAIN-ABLE? Conference
at La Station - Gare des Mines

SUSTAIN-ABLE?

Alter Places

Friday 25 April [in English]
@ Station Sud

9:45 - 10 am : Welcome & Introduction

10 - 10:45 am : "Popular Pleasures of Tomorrow?
Imagining the Future of the Cultural Economy"
Keynote by Mark Banks
(University of Glasgow)

11 - 11:45 am : "On the Problem of 'Meanwhile' Us"
by Emma Coffield (Newcastle University)

11:45 - 12 am : "Creative Preservation: Amplifying
the Dignity of Places through New Forms of
Creative Engagement"
by Nicolas B. Verger
(Dublin City University / Grenoble École de Management)
& Raffi Duymedjian
(Grenoble École de Management)

12:30 - 2pm : Lunch by Activ'18

2 - 3 pm : Alter-Places quantitative survey
research findings by Fabrice Rochelandet
(Sorbonne Nouvelle University)

3:15 - 6 pm : SUSTAIN-ABLE? sensible
restitution prototype - Presentation of Alter-
Places results & prototype, by Natalia
Bobadilla & Ilona Touchard [LabEx ICCA], and
Antoine Lefebvre, with the support of all the
partners (La Station - Gare des Mines, NGBG, Mocvara,
Izolyatsia, Urban Spree, Trans Europe Halles, Long Winter)

From 6:30 pm : Cocktail & dj sets

7 - 7:30 pm : Performance - Concert by the
duo Sonia Saroya & Fanny Testas on the
Instrumentarium
(residents of La Station - Gare des Mines)

**Saturday 26 April -
La Station fête le Printemps
[mostly in French]**
@ Station Nord   11:30 am - 8pm

– Creators' Market

– Workshops about DIY and
reuse manufacturing,
gardening and artistic
creations

Full program here

– Solidarity thrift shop : second hand clothes
(Benefits will fund the refugee day care center of La Station)

– Participative exhibition on refugee's stories &
open mic by local youngsters (in collaboration with
radio Station Station & Coucou Crew)

– Dj sets & concert with the immersive
Acousmonium Soundsystem

Both days

– SUSTAIN-ABLE? sensible restitution
prototype by Natalia Bobadilla, Ilona
Touchard and Antoine Lefebvre
@ Station Sud

The Alter Places sensible restitution unveils the findings
of a European project exploring the sustainability of
Alternative Cultural Places (ACPs) and their pivotal role
in ecological transition, resilience and democracy both
at a local and global level.

– Special guest invitation to Lotte Agger [DE]
Sleeping Beauties & Architecture of Ecstasy
@ Miniclub Sud

This exhibition brings together Sleeping Beauties
(2020–2022) and Architecture of Ecstasy (2023 ongoing),
offering a dual exploration of club culture between
stillness and release. Sleeping Beauties captures a
landscape of closures, conversions, and hopes of
reopening—a portrait of nightlife in forced slumber. In
dialogue, Architecture of Ecstasy enters spaces after the
party, asking what lingers when euphoria fades.

The SUSTAIN-ABLE? Conference was conceived as the final event to disseminate the outcomes of the Alter-Places project. The event brought together a professional audience from the fields of culture and ecology, and also institutional actors, with over 50 participants in attendance.

The first part of the day featured contributions from researchers offering fresh perspectives on sustainability issues within ACPs. The second part of the day showcased the project's findings through an interactive tour of the *SUSTAIN-ABLE?* restitution.
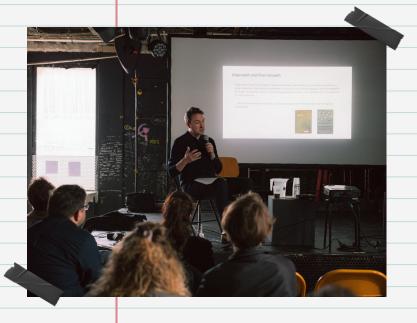
SUSTAIN-ABLE?

Alter Places

2 DAYS OF CRITICAL
CELEBRATION
OF ALTERNATIVE
CULTURAL PLACES

Join us to explore
sustainability
challenges, ecological
transition, and the
role of alternative
cultural places

April 25-26, 2025
La Station - Gare des Mines

In the frame of
Alter-Places
European project
co-funded by the
European Union

Scientific contributions

Mark Banks - University of Glasgow
"Popular Pleasures of Tomorrow? Imagining the Future of the Cultural Economy"

Professor Banks presents a critical interrogation of the cultural economy under conditions of ecological crisis and capitalist acceleration. Drawing from degrowth and post-growth theory, he questions whether the current models of "creative industry" are compatible with sustainable futures. He highlights that culture, traditionally tied to growth and productivity, must instead embrace a slower, more convivial orientation, less concerned with commercial value and more with joy, collective care, and «unproductive» forms of expenditure like festivals, play, and local art. His provocation: what kind of cultural plurality should we build in a world oriented toward "frugal abundance"?

When we think of the unfolding challenges of the climate crisis, what role do we ascribe for popular culture? Mostly we might assume that popular culture, a well, known source of 'trivial' entertainments, needless consumption, and spectacular waste, is partly to blame for ecological crises. This is not an unreasonable assumption, the culture industry is massively resource-intensive and polluting. Many argue we need to move beyond 'mass' or popular desires – to more 'degrown', 'local' or 'simple' cultures. But is this possible, or even desirable? What about human needs for connection, and for shared knowledges and intercultural symbols that might help us alleviate the climate crisis? What about creative expansion beyond our fixed communities and isolated selves? For this is what popular culture can also give us. Banks says the future must be sustainable, but it must include the necessities and gains of shared and globally extensive forms of popular culture. Yet, the challenge remains of how to make the popular pleasures of the future legible and possible in an ecologically challenged world."

Key concepts

Post-growth and degrowth cultural economies

The critique of consumerism and commodified creativity

Culture as essential to "unthinking" productivity and rethinking meaning

The need for new cultural systems that support symbolic, aesthetic, and communal exchange in sustainable ways

Emma Coffield – Newcastle University
"More Than Meanwhile Spaces"

Coffield's presentation draws from longitudinal research into 'meanwhile use', the practice of occupying spaces temporarily, especially by artists and cultural actors in the UK. While these spaces provide opportunities for experimentation and community engagement, they also perpetuate instability and marginality. The project reveals that artists often face severe limitations in these conditions (e.g., not being able to invest in equipment or long-term projects), and that these 'meanwhile' arrangements have become institutionalized in policy as a strategy for managing urban vacancy rather than empowering artistic communities.

While meanwhile space can work fantastically for some, it can also entrench structural inequalities already rampant in the sector, where insecure employment, freelance work, precarity and low pay are already the norm. Indeed, temporary space tends to amplify these concerns. A collective sense of impermanence, or the constant threat of being 'moved on', manifests in unsafe working conditions, the chronic waste of time and resources, a lack of security, exhaustion – and creative practices marked by uncertainty. If we are to truly value and uphold alternative cultural places, then, we must - as a matter of urgency - think beyond the 'meanwhile'.

She argues for the need to move beyond temporary use toward long-term business models for artists, supported by policy and embedded in broader urban strategy. Her work blends qualitative interviews, field research, and collaborative design to advocate for more dignified, stable models of spatial occupation for culture.

Key concepts

The rise and risks of "meanwhile use" as urban policy

Precarity and limitations placed on artists in temporary spaces

Advocacy for permanence, stability, and long-term cultural planning

Participatory research and design for policy change

Common Threads Across the Three Presentations

All challenge dominant narratives of cultural production tied to growth, novelty, and exploitation.

Each calls for a revaluation of care, continuity, and sustainability in cultural practices and policies.

They emphasize the importance of rethinking space, not just as a backdrop for culture, but as an active, relational site needing protection and long-term commitment.

They reveal the tensions between institutional frameworks and grassroots realities, offering visions for alternative cultural economies rooted in dignity, solidarity, and ecological awareness.

Nicolas B. Verger – Dublin City University and Grenoble Ecole de Management & Raffi Duymedjian – Grenoble Ecole De Management
"Creative Preservation: Amplifying the Dignity of Places"

This presentation proposes a "Creative Preservation" framework—a conceptual and ethical approach to engaging with space that values preservation over production. Their intervention shifts the logic of cultural development from an extractive or output-oriented model (focused on creation, novelty, and expansion) to one that dignifies existing places through care, attention, and relational practice. The dignity of a place, they argue, is enhanced through acts that slow down the cycle of cultural turnover and foster continuity, memory, and shared stewardship.

Key concepts

A turn from "the merit of production" to "the merit of preservation"

Spatial engagement rooted in creative care, not just creative output

Reframing artistic and cultural action as acts of attentiveness and relational sustainability

Aligning with the ethics of degrowth, without rejecting creative agency

Fabrice Rochelandet - Sorbonne Nouvelle University
Socio-ecological Practices & Alternative Cultural Places:
"Mapping and Key Drivers of Originality"

The presentation investigates how ACPs act as incubators for original socio-ecological practices, and explores:
• How to identify and categorize these practices
• The conditions under which such practices emerge and spread
• The organizational, material, and social drivers of innovation

Core Concepts and Hypotheses :
• ACPs are fertile grounds for ecological and social experimentation.
• These spaces operate with values rooted in solidarity, DIY ethics, horizontality, and community engagement.
• Socio-ecological innovation in ACPs often takes the form of "tacit knowledge", practice-based learning, and non-hierarchical decision-making.
• Innovation is not only technical but mediated by artistic, ethical, and spatial concerns.

Typology of Practices : a taxonomy of 607 cited ecological practices reveals the following focus areas:
• Reduction and reuse dominate (e.g. minimizing resource use, second-hand materials)
• Practices related to communication, eco-design, mutualization, and recycling are also significant
• Site development and adaptation are marginal due to precarity and uncertainty of ACP spaces
• Practices target resource use more than institutional change or large-scale mitigation

Practice Examples include:
• Shared solar energy
• Low-tech instruments and workshops
• Artistic gardens and participatory urban agriculture
• Dry toilets, LED lighting, zero plastic policies
• DIY printing and plant-based inks

Quantitative Results : based on 237 original practices analyzed through econometric modeling:
Factors Increasing Originality:
• Number of volunteers and team cooperation (+)
• Local and internal tensions (+): conflict and negotiation spur innovation
• Perceived impact of climate change (+): awareness motivates experimentation
• Partnerships and media influence (+): bring diverse knowledge and visibility
• Membership in European networks (+): facilitates resource sharing and learning

Factors Reducing Originality:

• Large budgets and organizational seniority (−): possibly due to risk aversion or bureaucratic inertia
• Institutional/funder influence (−): often encourages safe, legible, and conventional practices
• Knowledge sharing (−): standardized, easily shareable knowledge tends to lack novelty

Key Insights

• Innovation emerges from conflict: Local tensions, creative friction, and high human costs can generate breakthroughs.
• Original practices are grounded in material and social struggles: especially around mobility, consumption, and spatial constraints.
• Ecological mediation is artistic as well as operational: involving aesthetic experimentation, anti-hegemonic values, and cultural rights.
• Networks matter: ACPs that are embedded in broader European or cooperative networks innovate more due to exposure to diverse approaches and collective problem-solving.
• Support structures can stifle creativity if they favor measurability over experimentation.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Avoid one-size-fits-all solutions: Innovation in ACPs is locally rooted and deeply contextual.

Fund process, not just outcomes: Support for experimentation, even if messy or unresolved, is crucial.

Invest in connectors and mediators: These roles are essential to translating tension into transformation.

Rethink how sustainability is measured: Prioritize depth, relevance, and community

Cross-cutting Themes & Insights of these 4 Scientific Contributions

1. Reframing Sustainability

All four presentations argue that sustainability in ACPs must be understood beyond environmental metrics—it is also about cultural, spatial, and emotional durability. Whether through alternative economies (Banks), stable access to space (Coffield), care-based preservation (Verger), or local experimentation (Rochelandet), sustainability is relational, not technical.

2. Tension as a Motor for Innovation

From Rochelandet's econometrics to Coffield's interviews, tensions—between actors, values, or with institutions—are shown to spur creativity and reflection. These frictions require mediators, translators, and time, but can generate genuinely new cultural forms.

3. ACP as Site of Systemic Reimagining

Each speaker reaffirms the ACP not just as a venue or scene, but as an experimental system for rethinking how we live, relate, and create. Whether critiquing economic paradigms or testing alternative governance, these places are microcosms of broader transitions.

4. Challenges of Transfer & Policy

The presentations raise critical questions about how to share and scale ACP practices without co-opting or neutralizing them. There is skepticism toward policy frameworks that demand standardized outcomes, but a shared desire for better tools, networks, and political leverage to secure these fragile ecologies.

Together, these four contributions build a compelling narrative: sustaining alternative culture in times of crisis requires more than ecological awareness it demands political imagination, spatial justice, and care-based infrastructures. ACPs are not just reacting to crisis they are prototyping new futures, with all the contradictions and creative tensions that entails.

Restitution of *SUSTAIN-ABLE?*

The Alter-Places restitution unveils the findings of a European project exploring the sustainability of Alternative Cultural Places (ACPs) and their pivotal role in ecological transition, resilience and democracy both at a local and global level. More than just spaces for artistic expression, ACPs are vital sites of resistance, experimentation, and social cohesion. Yet, as the world faces climate catastrophe, ecosystem destruction, war, unemployment, rising social and economic inequalities, and upsurges of racism and xenophobia, these spaces are increasingly under threat.

SUSTAIN-ABLE? is a prototype of a sensible restitution that maps a loose topography of an increasingly challenging landscape for ACPs across Europe and beyond. Externally, these spaces face core challenges: real estate speculation, political neglect, eviction, bombings, and the fundamental fight for the right to space. Within, their communities grapple with issues of precarity, engagement fatigue, economic strain, limited professional resources, and managerial tensions, forcing them to continuously adapt in a context of uncertainty.

But SUSTAIN-ABLE? is not a lament. It is a question, a provocation, an exploration composed of images, artefacts, and testimonies that document the creative preservation practices emerging within ACPs: artistic curation, spatial reactivation, collective care, ecological resilience, and bold strategies of inclusiveness and social justice. Rather than offering definitive solutions, the restitution includes prototypes—conceptual and material—challenging us to rethink sustainability beyond its ecological application. If ACPs contribute to the renewal of artistic and resilient urban ecosystems, can they survive the current crises? What does it take to sustain them—without compromising their identity, autonomy, and transformative power?

SUSTAIN-ABLE? invites you to step into this uncertainty; to engage with the fragile, yet fiercely inventive, landscape of alternative cultures.

La Station fête le printemps
La Station celebrates spring

Community Outreach and Ecological Celebration

Event cofinanced by Paris & Métropole Aménagement P&Ma

The third day of the Alter-Places project closing event aimed to broaden the dissemination of the project's methodologies and outcomes to a non-professional audience, particularly targeting the local communities surrounding La Station – Gare des Mines.

This day embraced the arrival of spring through an alternative ecological lens, offering hands-on workshops in gardening, seed planting, DIY object-making using repurposed materials, painting, and the collaborative construction of a modular garden.

Designed to engage both the regular, culturally engaged audience of La Station and local residents, the event welcomed over 600 participants. The day featured an in-situ music program in La Station's garden, a local makers' market, and the final exhibition *SUSTAIN-ABLE?*.