

WORKSHOP APA 6507

The Champ des Possibles and the Surroundings of the Railway Track – Mile End, Montreal

In the course of the last century, Montreal, like most cities of the Western world, has undergone a significant deindustrialization phase, which has resulted in large numbers of urban industrial areas falling into disuse. The decline of the demand in rail transport has pushed railways, marshalling yards and industrial buildings into obsolescence. However, the economic and technological transformations of the end of the 20th century have given rise to the requalification of these sites, thus opening opportunities for new approaches in landscape.

During the 1980s in Montreal, the Canadian Pacific (C.P.) abandoned its marshalling yard located in the Mile End near the industrial textile district. Now devoid of an appointed function, vegetation gradually reclaims the disused site. It is frequented by the local population and adopted as a place of freedom, creativity, and opportunities. It is given the name: le Champ des Possibles (The Field of the Possibles).

The APA 6507 Workshop students were offered the chance to rethink the design of the ex-marshalling yard and the lots bordering the railway. If the abandonment was but a forty-year-long transition, the study site is currently approaching a new transformation cycle, all while retaining the qualities forged by the abandoned years: the arrival of resilient vegetation, the informal appropriation of the site, non-programmed events, etc. Today, the Champ des Possibles is known for these qualities and benefits from a unique co-management structure, the only one of its kind in the city. Its biodiversity is documented and protected, and it hosts a myriad of activities, which overflow into the two-kilometre spread of open spaces along the rail tracks. The site also retains its “abandoned aesthetic”, which confers its distinctive character. Hence, the question being asked as part of the workshop project is: how to plan a much loved and frequented site, situated at the heart of a vibrant neighbourhood, all while retaining the spirit of freedom specific to abandoned spaces?

The projects present solutions that aim to revitalize the site without losing sight of its unique character. As per the course objectives, they are the result of an iterative process where analyses and design are invariably intertwined. They also present the results of the concurrent *Designing with vegetation* course.