SOILS ARCHIVES: DIGGING FOR THICK COMMONS

Valentin Bansac

In southern Luxembourg, soils constitute an archive for the region's wealth, layering temporal stratas that connect the present with historical extractive industries such as coal production and steel manufacturing. Underneath the surface, the grounds blur the limits between human actions and the composition of the Earth. From the movements of polluted dirt to the economic repurpose of waste, *Soils Archives* investigates our relationship with what lies underground, imagining alternative narratives that transcend a purely economical valorization towards what could be defined as *Thick Commons*.

As an in-situ research endeavor, the project involves encounters with specialists in excavation—waste managers, construction companies, geologists—as well as soil revitalization—ecologists, researchers, politicians—to explore different understandings of our relationship with digging. When grounds are not only considered a material resource, they become a cosmopolitical tool to question the meaning of inhabiting the territories around us as well as the non-human dynamics that shape them.

Located around the city of Esch-sur-Alzette, several former waste sites from the steel industry slowly become potentials for urban growth due to their proximity with municipal areas, displaying samples of several stages of development. With an uncertain future, the Crassier Terres Rouges constitutes a border zone between Luxembourg and France that confronts two visions for a common territory, aspiring for urban developments and renaturation projects. Abandoned in the citizen imaginaries for its highly polluted grounds, its large amount of slag—waste from the steel ovens—is sold and reused for road stability as an alternative to the poor qualities of the "natural" geology of the region. As soils are dug, the history of southern Luxembourg is unearthed, deploying an aesthetic poetry composed of dirt nuances and indigenous species of plants that only grow in polluted areas.

By multiplying voices and representations, *Soils Archives* will foster the production of a multi-perspective narrative on the region's grounds and waste. The project will collect interviews, archives, drill cores and photographs to envision a new cartography that understands soils in depth, against the planar vision of urban development and territorial planning. Following a scouting trip in March 2025, the investigations will continue in September with extended visits, collaborations, encounters with specialists as well as the creation of visual and textual content.

VALENTIN BANSAC is an architect, researcher, and photographer from France. He previously worked with Rem Koolhaas at OMA/AMO, where he was part of *Countryside, The Future*, a research and exhibition project at Guggenheim New York. Valentin graduated from the Experimentation in Arts and Politics master's degree directed by Bruno Latour at the Paris Institute of Political Studies. He was involved in the two-year research program Domesticated Foodscapes at EPFL and recently participated in Organismo | Art in Applied Critical Ecologies, an initiative facilitated by TBA21. In 2022, he co-founded the collective MATTERS.xyz, with Alice Loumeau. Valentin is the co-curator of the Luxembourg pavilion entitled *Sonic Investigations* at the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale.

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Thanks to Joe Birsens and Daisy Wagner from the Department of Spatial Planning at the City of Esch-sur-Alzette. Thanks to David Peleman from the Master in Architecture at the University of Luxembourg. Thanks to Sophie Capus from the Administration of the Environment at the Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity, Luxembourg. Thanks to Lex Faber from Zeyen Baumann.



Crassier Terres Rouges, Esch-sur-Alzette, Valentin Bansac, 2025