



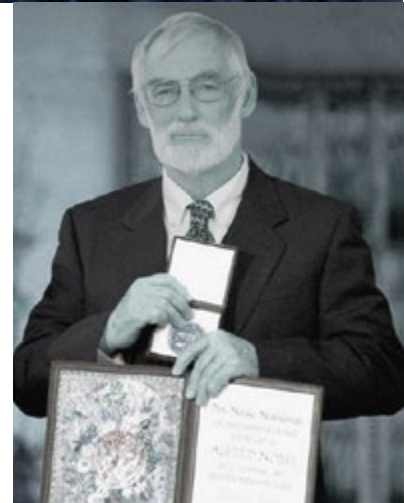
EUROPEAN URBAN AREAS Rising from the ashes?

 **Courrier
international**

Started in 2025, European programme
Low-tech Cities 2050 is now bearing fruits.
French engineers in the spotlight.

INTERVIEW

DENNIS MEADOWS,
NOBEL PEACE PRIZE
2030





Above: Catalonia, Barcelona airport business district project, abandoned in 2020.

Front-cover: Monaco, construction site of the Eco green-world residential complex, deserted for lack of investors.

EUROPEAN URBAN AREAS : RISING FROM THE ASHES?

Following a decade of continuous urban exodus, an equilibrium in the anthropocene landscape may have been reached in 2030. This is the conclusion of a vast study carried out by some thirty researchers from twelve European countries.¹

Urban decline

There was no hint of any mitigation in European cities' depopulation trend. Started with the 2021-oil shock, urban decline intensified throughout the Great Energy Decline (GED), ignoring the old continent's geographical and economic borders. After literally emptying most remote residential areas, desertion was making headway towards inner suburbs.

« Frequent water and electricity shortages, combined with struggling

food supply logistics, urged urban dwellers to make a choice: moving towards the city-centre, or leaving the city.» analyses Pablo Servigne, coordinator of the study.

City-centres' limited housing and job capacities made most of them move to the countryside, swelling the ranks of precarious rural farm workers.

Post-oil design

So as to contain the phenomenon, a large eco-restoration programme

co-financed by World Bank and European Union was launched in 2025. Ecosystem restoration engineering is naturally on the rise. Low-tech thinking for post-oil design is adopted by most urban reconstruction actors.

French engineers in the spotlight

Karen Michel , C.E.O of **setec**, the French engineering company that was awarded twelve of Europe's

¹ « In 2030, for the first time in ten years, European major cities' population stabilised », Pr. Pablo Servigne told AFP on the eve of the revelation of this vast survey, carried out on behalf of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

forty major eco-restoration projects, keeps unassuming : « We recognised changing world patterns at the right time, and maybe adapted a little quicker than others ». Her light-bulb moment? «The call of 15,000 climate scientists in 2017. This is when I realized that our system was crossing the line.»

Rising from the ashes

Urban abandoned areas can profitably be seen as huge deposits of building materials. **Setec** has taken advantage of existing urban patterns to redesign the foundations of a sustainable city. « All you have to do is bend down: everything is there, right at our feet », K.M. says, smiling. « GED is nothing like a punishment descending upon

men ». She insists: « Less energy enhances mutual help, smarter design, and more-human relationships. We put forward resiliency rather than high-technology. And, last but not least, we must be thankful for it, as it may save us from the most serious consequences of climate change ».

Low-tech thinking

The French group has developed extensive expertise in low-tech design, which opposes simple and integrated solutions to complex problems. The benefits of this systemic approach are particularly visible in the mimicry of mechanisms from the living world : ecosystem planning of peri-urban farming, regeneration of wastelands by mycoremediation, small-scale

phyto-purification plants, bioclimatic rehabilitation of built heritage.

To date, the group's flagship projects include the Great Mangroves Belt in Netherlands, two net-energy recycling plants in Berlin and Katowice, as well as London and Paris bio-mastered fertilization food circuits.

Equipe 12

story and detailed analysis

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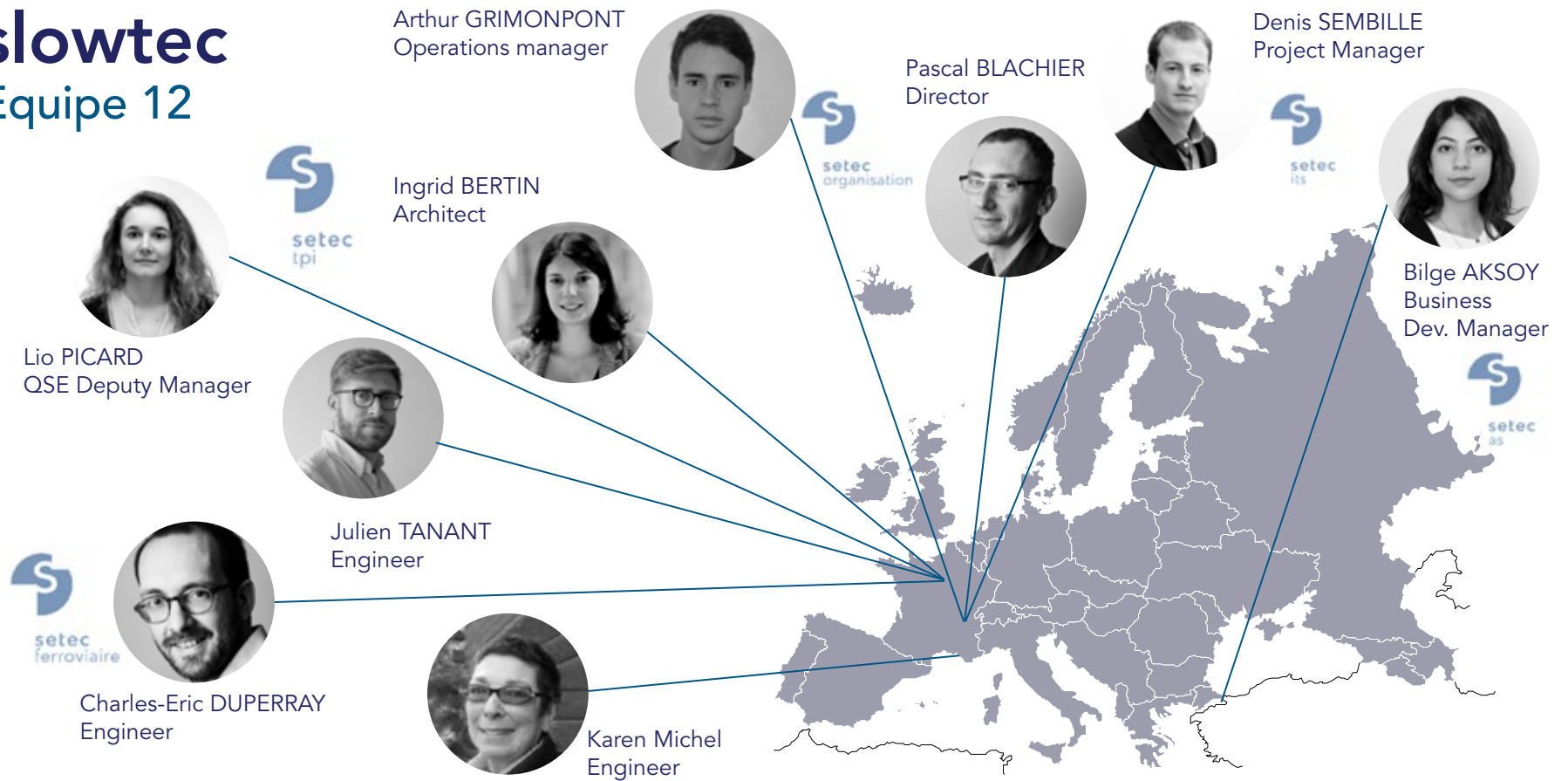


Below : Bogota, rehabilitation of the business district into an housing park, self-sufficient for food and energy.



slowtec

Equipe 12



Above: Catalonia, Barcelona airport business district project, abandoned in 2020.

In an era characterized by scarce energy and materials resources, **setec** engineers have reinvented the classic innovation model based on the search for complex and energy intensive technological solutions. Questioning the need and adaptation to lifestyle have guided the low

tech principles needed to design a technically and humanly sustainable society.

Ingenuity, systemic approach and pragmatism, are some of the skills that give **setec** a pioneering role in urban construction in 2030.