

7. Experience and Venue Content



7.0 Experience& Venue Content

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7.1 A University Campus like no other

To be successful this project must create a venue that puts the campus on the map – one that will make national and international students think “I want to study there”, and businesses, NGOs and innovators to feel it is a place of vision, momentum and continental importance. This is important not just in the mission, attitude, experience and mix of elements of the campus, but in creating a strong visual identity that can help it stand out.

The different components of the campus include:

1. The Gaia primary learning venue



2. Student accommodation



3. Landscape functions including unions, cafes, outdoor learning, making and growing spaces



7.1 A university campus like no other

Overall campus objectives:

- › To showcase how the cycles and systems we rely on for fresh air, clean water, fertile soil, nutritious food, rich biodiversity, a stable climate and a natural recycling system are threatened, so are we.
- › To nurture forms of systems thinking inspired by interactions between cycles.
- › To provide students with a foundational knowledge that is both grounded in ecology and extends out into metaphor – we will show that cycles and systems are concepts to understand and a tool to think with.
- › To provide an inspiring space to be immersed in these often-invisible planetary cycles, meaning students are constantly learning from nature.
- › To create a broader campus embedded in the landscape – creating unique and beautiful contexts for staying, socialising, relaxing and studying that use nature as host and inspiration.

Desired impacts:

All students, regardless of field of study, age or length of stay will:

- › leave understanding what humans need to do to address the planetary emergency using ecological systems thinking
- › have a renewed appreciation for and connection to nature, both local and global
- › be encouraged to act conscientiously and imaginatively, applying this thinking to their respective courses and lives

Research spaces for university staff will be unique, inspiring and engage visitors, students, business and innovators.

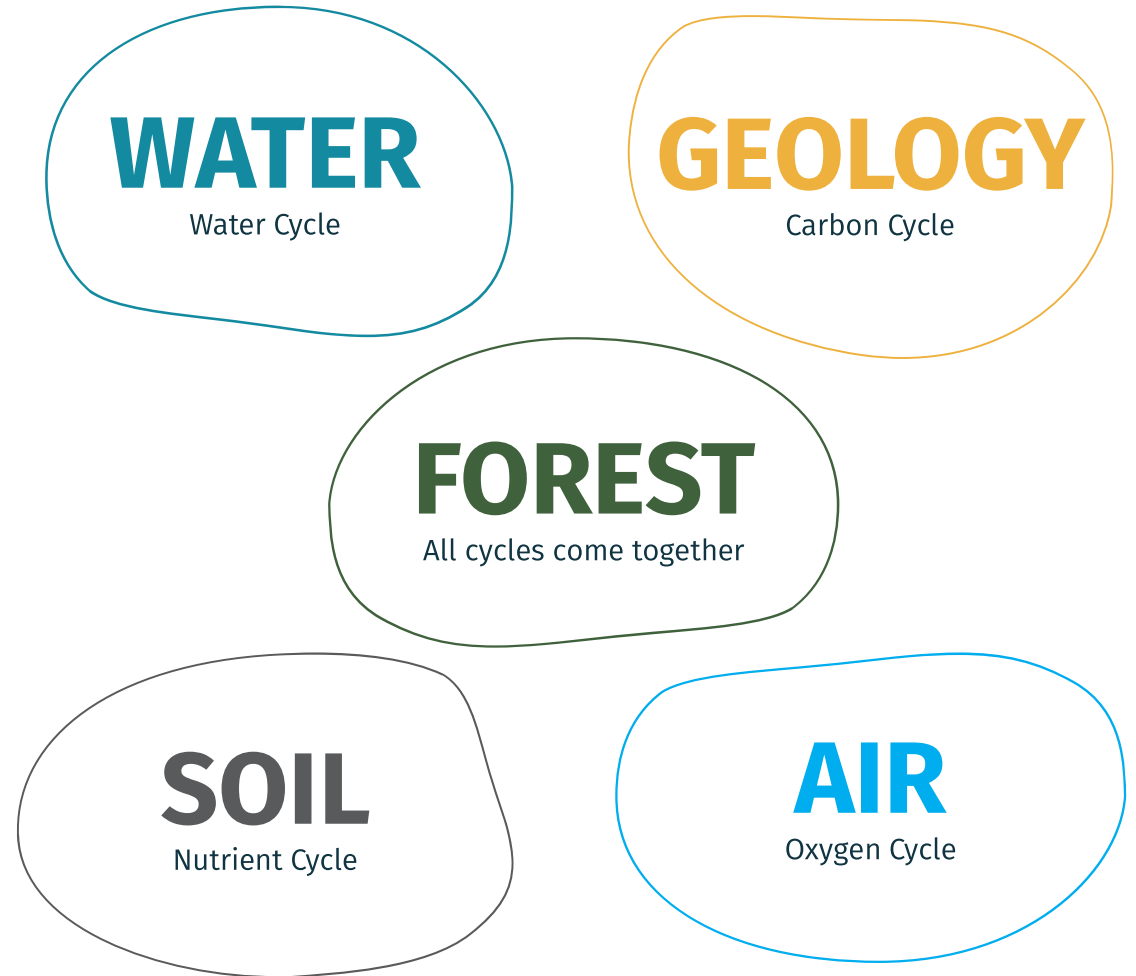
The campus will demonstrate how we can learn differently, integrating learning with spaces for living, socialising and relaxing that maximises the health and well-being of students and the environment.

7.2 The Gaia – Primary Learning Venue

The Gaia is the main iconic venue and principle experiential space of the project. Here, we will create learning spaces like no other – an extraordinary range of theatrically imagined ecosystems that provide contexts for different types of learning in spaces that will generate awe, inspiration and excitement. This venue will provide a new way of revealing the importance of ecological and systems thinking by physically, emotionally and intellectually immersing visitors in natural phenomena, flows and ecosystems.

The concept that underpins The Gaia venue is inspired by the Gaia hypothesis, originally developed by James Lovelock, that proposes that Earth exists in a habitable state due to self-regulatory feedbacks (here referred to as ‘cycles’) that are tightly coupled and interdependent. These feedbacks exist between the biosphere and its inorganic surroundings. This hypothesis sees Earth as ‘the largest living organism in the Solar System’ (Lovelock, 1986). It suggests that the biosphere and Earth systems respond to each other in ways that maintain homeostasis.

In recognition of the fundamental importance of interacting cycles and systems in maintaining life on Earth, The Gaia venue consists of five extraordinary learning spaces that showcase different elements of the planetary cycles, along with a range of supporting areas for research and offices. Four of these learning spaces will be ‘spheres’ themed on one of the chosen planetary cycles:



7.2 The Gaia – Primary Learning Venue

In the centre of The Gaia will be a larger forested area which will bring all of these cycles together dynamically. This will create a series of spaces that can provide varying types of learning environments to support individual learning, work, group discussions, tutor groups or more media and material-based lessons. These learning spaces are purposefully reimagined from the more institutional and traditional forms. Whether a classroom, study room, seminar space or media/ presentation space, in The Gaia these will all be embedded in natural settings, freeing thinking from conventional classrooms – whether they are seminars in forest glades, presentations in dark geological seams or individual study up in the clouds. The outside landscape will likewise support a series of exterior classroom spaces and areas for practical lessons and research.

Importantly, all learning spaces must fulfil multiple functions:

1. **Spaces for learning** – be it university students, visiting schools or wider education programmes.
2. **Areas for convening** – to make it the most spectacular space for external workshops, conferences, AGMs, training courses etc. A range of five different areas that could host break out areas.
3. **Worlds to experience** – creating ways to “turn the volume up” on these worlds to create a series of experiential adventures for tourism, which will support additional tourism offers including elements in the landscape as well as programmes and workshops within the spaces.

An overview of each one of the spaces follows, with an indication of the types of learning environments and themes that will be embedded in each – as well as outlining an “experiential mode” which gives an indication of how this space may transform when it is a visitor experience rather than a student learning space.



7.2 The Gaia – Primary Learning Venue



7.3 The Gaia – Forest

Here in the Forest we re-unite our planet's earliest plants - including tree ferns native to New Zealand, palms from South America, bamboos from Africa, gingers from Asia – creating a lush, evergreen grove of trees. As in the ancient Greek Akademia, our forest grove is the heart of our new green campus.

About 300 million years ago, during the Carboniferous era, the vast Silesian coal seams - now extracted from beneath our feet - were created from the earliest plants. At this time, primeval forests evolved and grew on the supercontinents of Gondwana, Pangea and Laurussia which later broke up to create our five modern continents, separating these early plants and animals. Isolated from each other, populations evolved independently and now we find organisms on different continents that are similar, yet different.

As the break-up of the ancient supercontinents disconnected populations, humans have further jumbled the natural order. We now live in the Anthropocene – The Age of Humans. Our trade, our migrations, our curiosity and our whimsy have further moved around and drawn together plants creating extraordinary combinations. Our gardens, our collections, our museums all hold these new menageries which allow us to celebrate Nature's adaptability and resilience.

Islands, particularly the oceanic and volcanic islands, reveal and highlight Nature's adaptability and resilience. Volcanic islands like the Azores rose out of the waters of the Atlantic and, lacking an old ecology of their own, early plant colonisers drifted and blew in from all over, settled and evolved in situ creating rich, wondrous and unique forms. Then humans began using islands as trading posts and brought their own organisms (accidentally and deliberately). This blend of island endemics and human-induced migrations have created places of awesome wonder. Familiar, yet strange and surreal.

Our Forest – with a climate similar to the mild oceanic islands of Madeira and the Azores – is our own strange and surreal island that re-unites the organisms of the old super continents – creating a contemporary grove at the natural heart of our green campus.



7.3 The Gaia – Forest

Journey through living forest to see how different planetary cycles come together and interact to produce a natural life support system for all life on Earth.

Themes: Interconnectedness of all planetary cycles and the living world.

Description: The Forest is a central day lit environment, where a lush forest grows and where clearings, treehouses, hollows and riverbanks offer a range of extraordinary contexts for learning, exploration and reflection. A waterfall falls from one side, with the water body creating a stream through the space, curving round in a circular water system.

Glades and platforms are nestled within a multi-level space, creating multiple spaces for groups of up to 20 to gather. This will be supported by a larger natural auditorium space for conferences and lectures. More private enclosed learning spaces are embedded in the landscape – visible or hidden depending on the time of day.

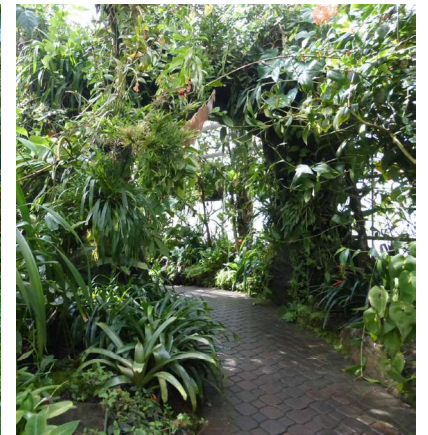
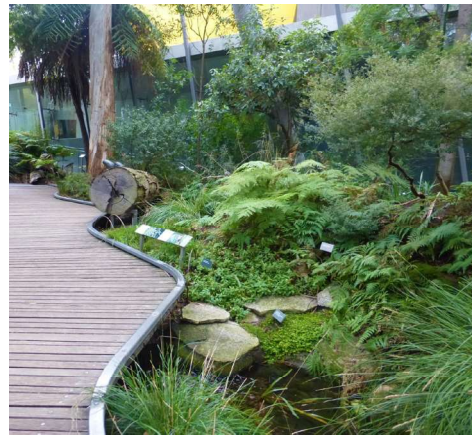
The planetary cycles of each sphere are brought together within the Forest. A design language of flows (that can also provide wayfinding) will link the separate spaces both with each other and with the central forest, guiding visitors and students throughout the spaces and demonstrating the interconnectedness of the cycles.

Learning Environment: learning in nature; group conversations, tutorials.

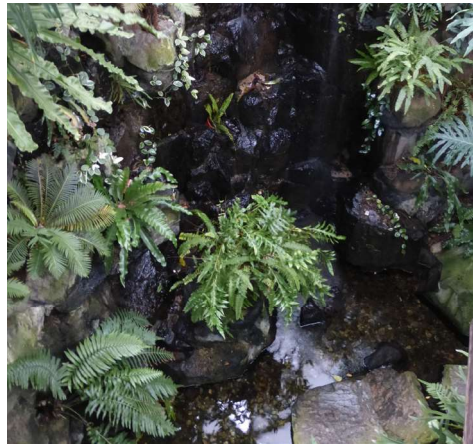
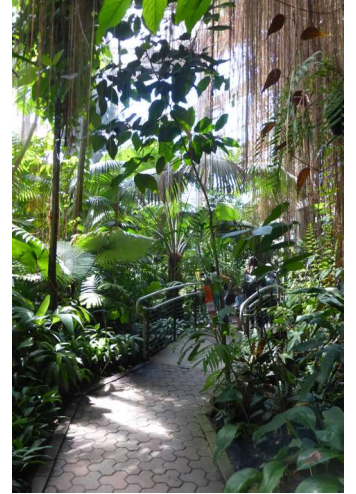
Experiential Mode: lighting and projection show cycles from the other four spheres moving through the Forest. There is an ability to turn the waterfall flow up and down. A central form creates a range of physical and digital overlays of how the systems and cycles interact; this acts as a living manifestation of big systems thinking.



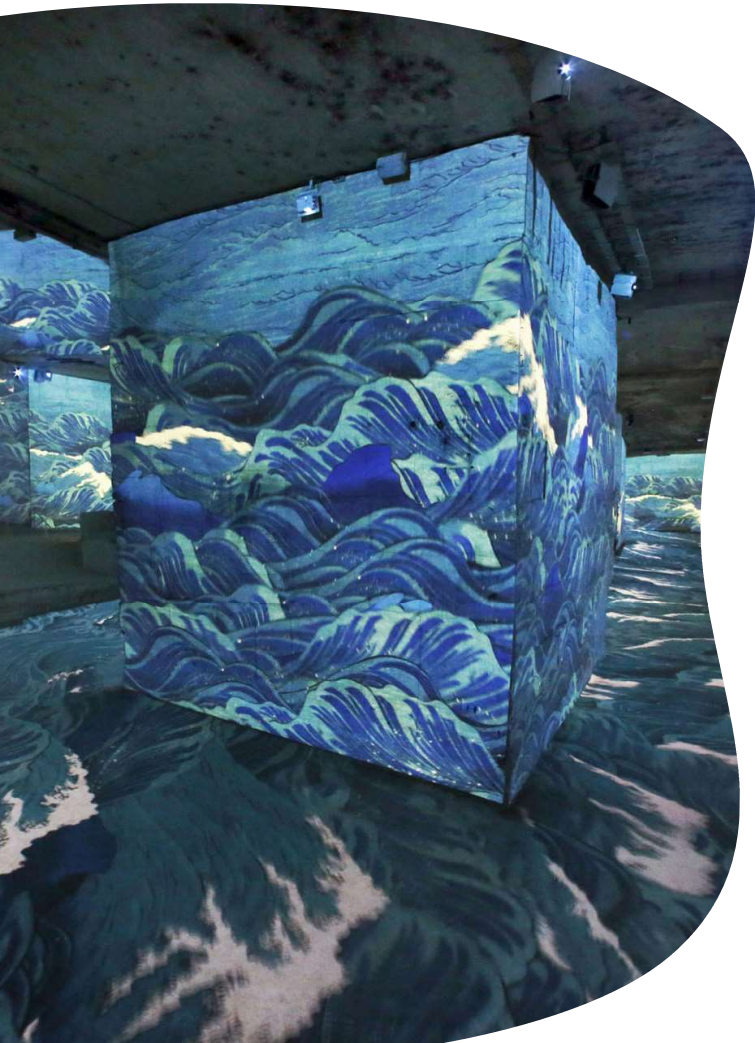
7.3 The Gaia – Forest



7.3 The Gaia – Forest



7.4 The Gaia – Geology



Travel down into rock and through deep time to explore the carbon cycle: how it works, what it makes and what can happen when it is altered.

Themes: History, deep time and the carbon cycle.

Description: Branching from the main forest is a tunnel that takes visitors into the dark geological world of rock and buried carbon. The tunnel space could be inspired by coal or limestone – and in general embodies geological material made from carbon over deep time.

We would like to explore the way that the walls could be bas relief sculpture – telling stories of the carbon cycle, deep time and the Carboniferous – with small dead-end seams branching off from a central tunnel, providing areas for exhibits, study and conversation.

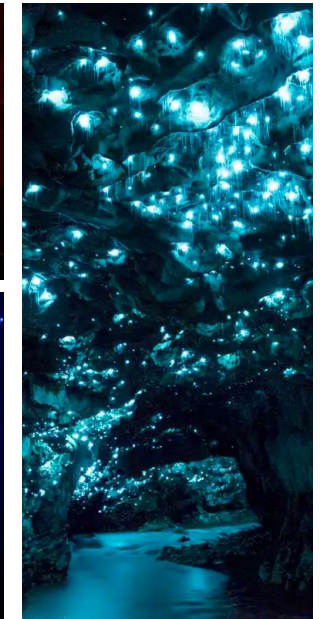
These geological tunnels could slowly morph to lignin and tree rings as if walking through a more organic seam, which in turn will connect more obviously to the central forest and show how the carbon cycle flows through all life – shapeshifting on its journey between rock, the dead and the living.

Learning Environment: darker space for a range of presentation and media-based lessons and events.

Experiential Mode: projection mapping onto the bas-relief sculptures for a fully immersive media show. A labyrinth of spaces with pockets of 'black box' areas allowing for a changing programme of digital art installations, utilising height in places for both journeying downwards and dramatic scale when looking up from the ground.

The area will include some larger spaces for permanent full scale digital immersive exhibits that tell the story of carbon and deep time.

7.4 The Gaia – Geology



7.5 The Gaia – Water

Be immersed in a range of water-based spaces to see how water moves between places and its three states.

Themes: The water cycle, health and well-being.

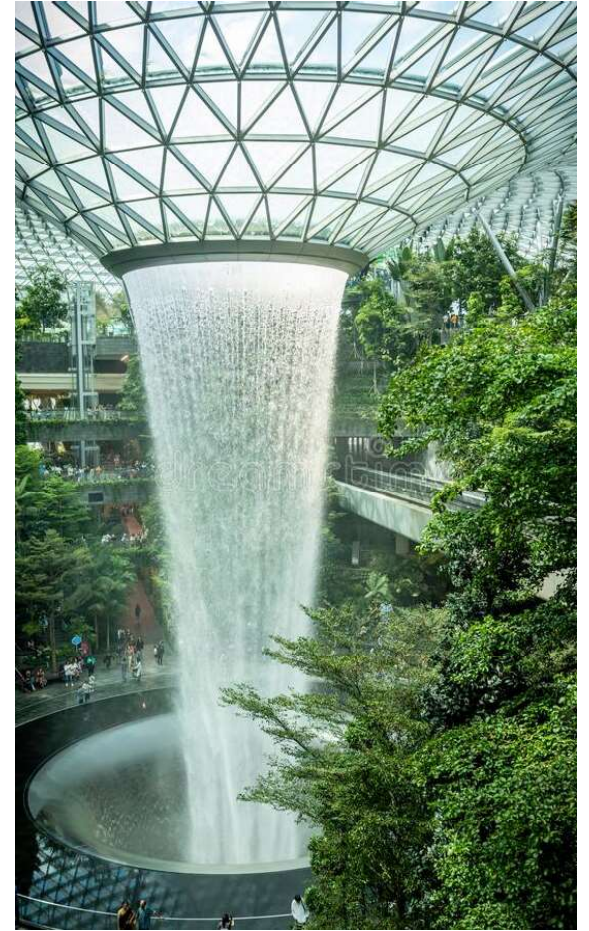
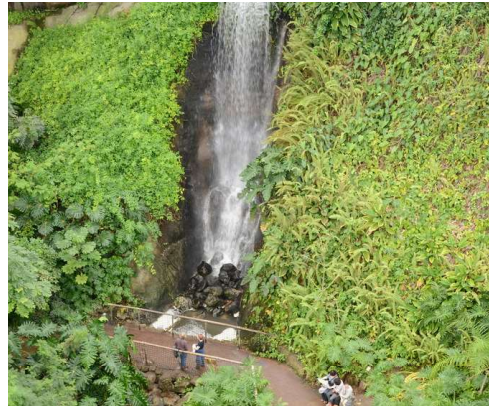
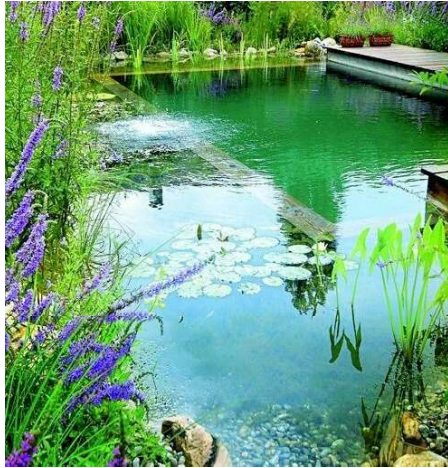
Description: Positioned above the ground floor of the Forest (the river that runs through Water turns into the waterfall within the forest space). This is a daylight space that mimics a riverbank – the water moves slowly with boulders creating pools that create spaces for paddling and dipping; this is supported by a sauna that allows movement between warm water vapour and the colder water bathing pools. This area creates the surrounding social context to the library, which stands nearby but separate to the river, and houses a collection of core regenerative texts and course specific books and materials. A gentle grass bank forms an area for relaxing, gathering and reading books in a unique setting, whilst also providing space for activities and exercises in winter months.

Learning Environment: library and relaxation space.

Experiential Mode: evaporation will be brought to life as installation above the river, with storm clouds becoming heavier before downpouring water into the river below. Kinetic installations are moved and driven by these downpours, with filling buckets and turning wheels revealing hidden elements.



7.5 The Gaia – Water



7.6 The Gaia – Soil

Explore the hidden world of soil and how nitrogen cycles through it, and its relationship to the food we eat (contextualised by food and beverage adjacencies). Become integrated into the web of giving, taking and making.

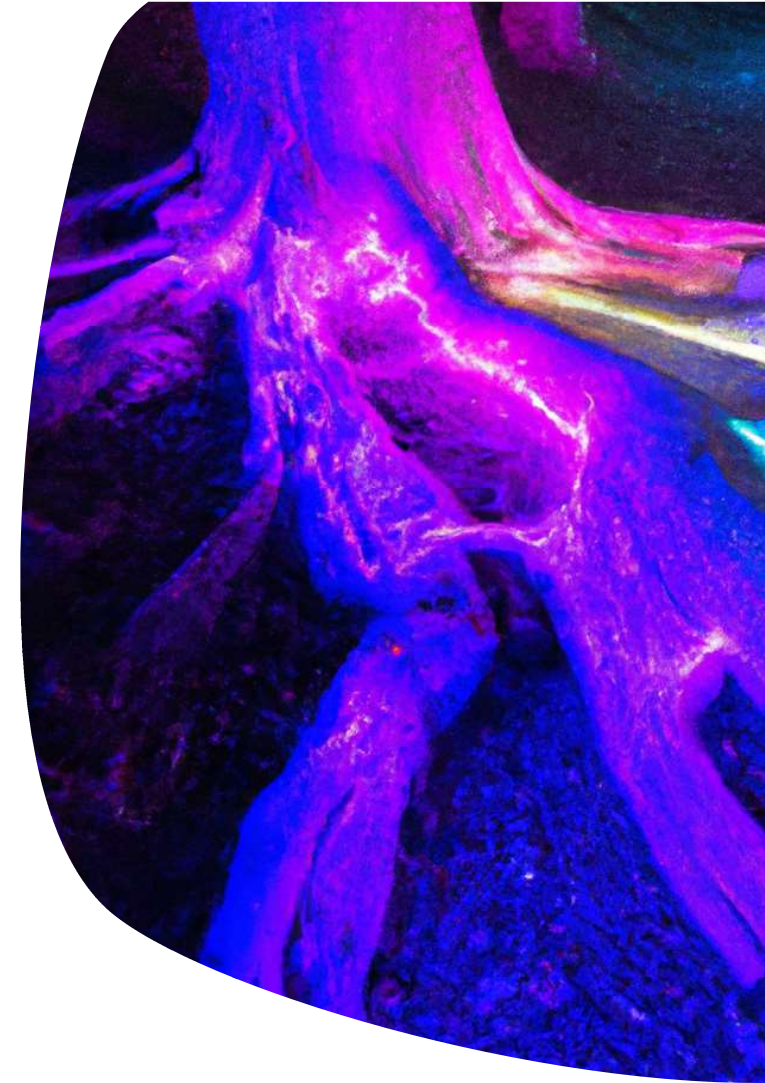
Themes: The nitrogen cycle, soil processes, life in the soil and food.

Description: The main entrance into The Gaia sees visitors journey down into the world of Soil. This is split into three broad areas: the main space represents the main social space of The Gaia, where a bar and restaurant provide a “Union” style space embedded within a world where roots, fungal mycelium and the abundant life within the soil surround the tables. Adjacent is a more fully immersive imagining of the cycles within the soil: using interactive lighting and projection to reveal the world of soil seen like never before, visualising the flows of nutrients that are exchanged between life below and above.

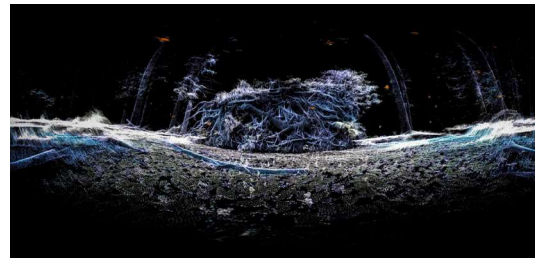
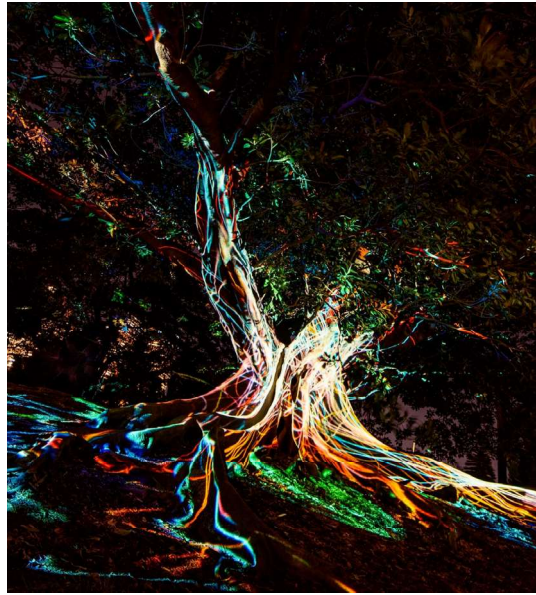
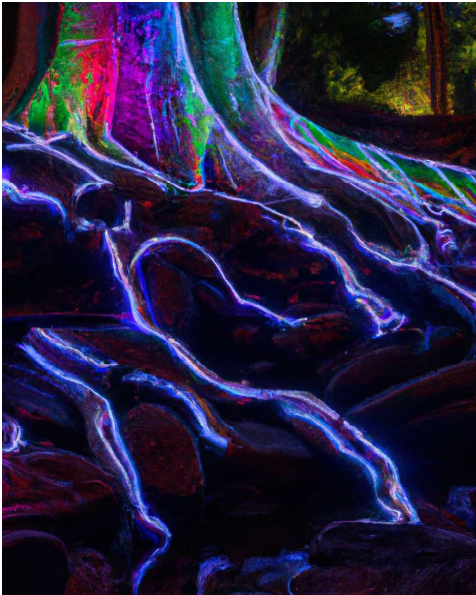
Above this main venue, visitors can follow the mycelium to discover its fruiting bodies sprouting in a bar that offers panoramic views across the Forest. Here, surrounded by giant playful mushrooms, a series of routes connect to other spheres around The Gaia.

Learning environment: Union style gathering spaces with linked F&B and gathering.

Experiential mode: Our world of Soil will harness a range of lighting, projection and physical installations that imagine the flows and life within the soil in hyper-real wonder – turning the intensity and speed of this world up for different audiences. The flows and connections between plants and trees under the soil will be represented with lighting and video effects, constantly flowing through the spaces and visibly linking through to the forest area.



7.6 The Gaia – Soil



7.7 The Gaia – Air



Journey into the sphere of Air – climbing up into the atmosphere above the forest to discover a range of experiences and study areas that free minds from the world below, and fully immerse students in the realm of air that our lives are suspended in and dependent on.

Themes: Oxygen cycle, stories of atmospheric movement, air quality and pollution.

Description: Air takes visitors on a journey up into the sky of The Gaia – creating multiple levels of discovery including giant nets, play, and lighter than air immersive experiences.

It will harness a series of bubble environments at height – fully transparent above and below, where a series of desks and workspaces give students an extraordinary context for individual work, thought, essay writing, research etc.

Learning Environment: Individual workspaces

Experiential Mode: Kinetic installations, utilising the movement of air in the space, are used at scale and height. These take the form of shimmering walls or large moving structures. Misting water effects also show the movement of cloud like forms. Some elements of sound are triggered by the air movement. Digital experiential elements are also incorporated, inspired by the movement of air.

7.7 The Gaia – Air



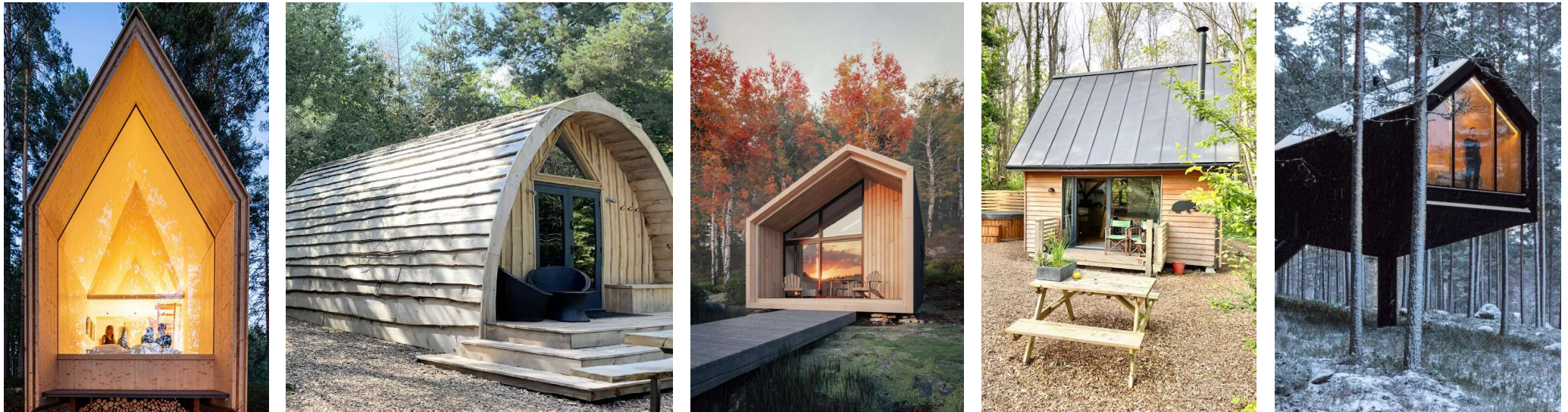
7.8 Student Accommodation

In its initial phase, we will have 35 students staying on-site. This will build each year as we develop accommodation for an additional 35 students for year two and three respectively, with a view that, as part of their courses, students will support in the building of the accommodation for the next year's students.

We imagine this will see the development of different options and types of accommodation across site. In year one these will likely take the form of low-cost "pods" that will harness natural materials and have water and energy needs provided by the wider project infrastructure.

Over time the accommodation could expand to include treehouse options in the Forest or can incorporate the old mine railway tracks and rains as spaces to live on and in.

Importantly, this approach creates flexibility to respond to increasing demand.



7.9 Landscape functions

Unions, cafes, outdoor learning, making and growing spaces

The accommodation will be supported by wider student infrastructure embedded in the landscape. This will include additional venues around the accommodation to create a cluster of spaces for students – including a bar, café, shared kitchens and social spaces both covered and around camp fires. These areas need a level of privacy and security away from main public routes.

This will also be supported by a network of learning and doing spaces within the landscape. While The Gaia will provide an extraordinary space for year-round learning, it is also crucial that there are a number of spaces in the masterplan for outside natural learning, both open and sheltered. These are likely to be adjacent to areas for doing – either workshops for making, or landscape areas for growing a series of regenerative crops and living materials so that areas of the landscape become demonstrators.



7.10 Digital Layer

Underpinning the entire site is a system in itself: a centralised hub containing all of the site's information and research for pre and post visit use. This may take the form of an app or website, provided it is accessible from any smartphone both on and off site.

- › The students' research and work will be kept here as a repository in an accessible form for public use – the opposite of undergraduate research papers being left to gather dust online and never be read again. This will create and grow a branching system of research on research like the tree roots of knowledge.
- › The visitors can use it on their day out to get involved with the projects the students are working on. They can become part of the research and are a pool of research subjects from which the students can pull on; essentially citizen science guided by research. This will require ethics considerations. It also offers the advantage of constantly changing programmes based on the students' work, helping with repeat visitation.
- › The digital layer will also include more traditional visitor information like maps and guided audio journeys for people who do not want to get more deeply involved with the student work. Audio guides with headphones also have the advantage of providing visitors with information whilst at the same time maintaining a quiet study area environment for others.



Virtual Tour

[Visit Eden](#)

Experience a taste of the Eden Project from wherever the world.

Enjoy unseen perspectives from live 360° camera streams in the Amazon and Mediterranean Biomes and explore aerial views and 360° photos of our global gardens. Discover fascinating facts, exhibitions and more.



7.11 A destination for national and international visitors

The project will provide a national and international draw for visitors. The model described will create a diverse year-round offer that drives sufficient revenue to cover the operational costs for the site. The visitor offer will fall into three broad categories. A visit could encompass one or all of the elements.

This includes:

Visiting The Gaia. The Gaia will be an exciting international visitor destination. We will develop an operational approach that not only caters for both its learning and tourism offer, but indeed strengthens each of its respective offers by the interactions between the two. Visitors may be taken on tours or be part of the students' research; while the requirement for students to help in the running of The Gaia – from tour guide, to front of house, to café - will put into practice a broad set of skills, crucially including the communication of science.

Having students working within the operations team (overseen and mentored by dedicated professionals) will lead to a unique experience while also transforming the operational model and potential overheads: The Gaia in many ways belongs to the students, and therefore reframes the relationship between a university and its ownership of facilities.

We imagine a visit to The Gaia will work on pre-booked timed entry, enabling control of how visitors move through and experience the space. Tourism hours are likely to be separated from condensed lesson and seminar hours, potentially splitting between morning, afternoon and evening sessions, although we have built in facilities and experiences that will enable them to coexist at the same time. The guides/narrators will likely be a mix of trained storytellers and students.

The overall learning objectives for a visitor will be similar to those detailed for students as outlined in section 6.1, with the spheres being able to “turn up” the level of experience by show controlling a range of media, lighting and installation to create a more exciting and adventurous journey through The Gaia's worlds.

7.11 A destination for national and international visitors

Non-Gaia elements

The wider masterplan is ripe for exploration.

We will deliver Czechia's best play – inhabiting a series of spaces that journey from hill to productive areas, forest canopy to waterways. This will have elements for all ages and abilities, and will move from wild nature play to adrenaline fuelled activities. Some will be inspired by the wider legacy of Czech fairy tales and folklore.

The landscapes themselves will offer a range of workshops and live demonstrators to show what a regenerative future could look like. Visitors will be welcomed by students, researchers and innovators to help take part in trials, plantings and tastings.

A range of camping and glamping options will encourage visitors to stay overnight and be immersed in nocturnal nature and the stars. This will harness the Czech love of journeying into nature, and create a range of camp fire spots and shelters.

This will all be supported by a range of regenerative food and beverage offers: from meals in The Gaia, to pop up restaurants that are directly sourcing produce grown on site.

There will also be an overlay of leisure trails – for bikes, walking and potentially boating.



7.12 A regional learning and doing hub in the centre of Europe

While The Gaia and wider landscape will be home for some of the university's courses and research, we will not be limited to engaging university students, but instead look to how we can create a flexible place for learning and doing for school children, the public, organisations and companies.

The region lies at the heart of Europe, and the opportunities for it to become a European home for regenerative and big systems thinking is immense – combining its great connectivity with the region, with the extraordinary nature of the venues and landscape infrastructure.

From extended out-of-term-time courses, to shorter week programmes, multi-day school immersions or full day deep dives – we will tailor a range of courses for all audiences to maximise impact and relevance.

The Gaia lends itself as an extraordinary space for conferences, events and AGMs; with a network of diverse, characterful spaces that offer year-round availability, and a large site that can be activated in many different ways: from talks through to making and growing workshops, learning with hands and the senses.



7.13 A home for regenerative partners

We will likewise create clusters for innovators, businesses, thinkers, NGOs, practitioners and organisations working within the area of regenerative sustainability and systems-thinking. This will be part of a longer-term phasing, with the potential to activate areas of the site – or even the adjacent Darkov mine facilities – for workshops, units and offices that can house like-minded thinkers, doers and innovators.

Such clusters can be hugely valuable – it enables support, knowledge and experience to flow through an evolving network, but it also creates adjacencies between businesses/ employers and their prospective future employees.

We expect some of our core opening partners will be in the area of renewable energy, alternative materials and regenerative agriculture – with areas of our masterplan dedicated to rewilding and trialling the growing of new crops for food and materials.



7.14 A new cultural hub for local communities



This project must be a catalyst for local communities to imagine what their future can look like. It must be an asset for them to dream, but also be a space that can provide opportunities to impact their everyday lives and livelihoods. This objective is not last through importance – but as a way to stress that all the previous elements of the scheme will be open and available to local residents. We would hope all children will be part of an extended learning programme; we expect families to use the play, trails and F&B options as part of their everyday lives; we would hope the engagement with research and innovation would inspire new curiosities and careers; while the wider impact of a world-class project being on the doorstep would facilitate a range of wider socio-economic opportunities, in part driven by Eden's focus on local sourcing and partnerships.

But likewise, we want to make sure that the site is directly responding to local needs and desires, as well as creating a wider cultural hub that can host conversations, programmes and celebrations. This deep community partnership is fundamental to what Eden does and the emerging masterplan would be further informed by these relationships.