

The background of the entire page is a detailed topographic map. It features a complex network of blue contour lines of varying thicknesses, representing different elevations. The map is oriented with North at the top. The lines are more densely packed in some areas, indicating steeper slopes, and more spread out in others, indicating flatter terrain. The overall color palette is a mix of light blue, white, and a very light tan or beige, which is the color of the paper itself.

LATITUDES EURAU26

*Situated reflections on
architectural research*

UMA 10-13 June 2026



LATITUDES. Situated reflections on architectural research

Maria Luna Nobile

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THEME AND CONTEXT

Maria Luna Nobile

ABOUT EURAU

European Research in Architecture and Urbanism

EURAU's main concern is to establish these meetings as a forum for debate and discussion of contemporary discourses in Architecture and Urbanism.

The French Ministry of Culture initiated EURAU in 2004. Since then, a series of international editions have taken place with the participation of hundreds of passionate and enthusiastic researchers from around the world, today reaching the Nordic countries. The series organised by different Schools of Architecture are around the following themes:

EURAU 2004 École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Marseille "On Doctoral Research"

EURAU 2005 École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et Paysage de Lille "Large Scale"

EURAU 2006 Association des Instituts Supérieurs Brussels-Liège-Mons (IESA) "Cultural Heritage"

EURAU 2008 Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de la Universidad Politécnica de Madrid "Cultural Landscape"

EURAU 2010 Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II "Venustas / Architettura / Mercato / Democrazia"

EURAU 2012 Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto "Public Space and Contemporary City"

EURAU 2014 Istanbul Technical University "Composite Cities"

EURAU 2016 Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning in Bucharest "In Between Scales"

EURAU 2018 Alicante University "RETROACTIVE"

RESEARCH: Architecture's capacity to challenge and extend the limits of other disciplines"

EURAU 2020/21 Birmingham University "Multiple identities reflection on European cities"

EURAU 2024 Politecnico di Milano "In presence / Body and Space"

EURAU 2026 Umeå School of Architecture, Umeå University "LATITUDES"

ABOUT UMA Umeå School of Architecture

The EURAU26 LATITUDES symposium will take place at Umeå School of Architecture, (UMA) Umeå University. Our department hosts researchers and educators from different latitudes around the world. Shaped by its climate situated only 400km south of the Arctic Circle in Västerbotten county, Umeå is located in southern Sápmi. In its third cycle of industrialisation, coined the green transition, Umeå is embedded in a quickly transforming forest landscape, while being strongly connected to its indigenous culture and tradition. Umeå is a city in continuous transformation, in which the University plays a pivotal role. The city is known internationally for being a laboratory for hardcore punk music and as one of the European Capitals of Culture in 2014.

The research environment at Umeå School of Architecture is structured in four main thematic areas: Architectural Design; History, Theory and Critical Studies; Landscape and Urbanism; and Building Construction, Materiality and Computational Design. Our research groups address multiple perspectives in relation to these four thematic areas: Swedish Housing Standards, Designing the Contemporary City, Infrastructures of Care, Designing Cycles at 64°, Architecture and Wood, Making Architecture Politically, Intersectional Ecologies, and Digital Materials. The education at Umeå School of Architecture is organised in studios conceived as experimental laboratories of ideas that intersect with the

research groups and define lines of action in relation to contemporary questions of our discipline.

UMA's research groups and studios contribute at different levels to the international, national and local debate in the field of architecture through active collaborations, both with other departments at Umeå University and with external institutions, organisations, and researchers at local, national and international levels, with implications for policy, practice, and society at large. Our PhD Programme in Architecture acts as a third level of education, adding to the architectural programme and master's in architecture and urban design. UMA aims to educate architectural scholars on specific areas of research at the intersections of architecture, urbanism, landscape, and technology from both a theoretical and practical perspective within diverse cultural, social, and political contexts.

The notion of LATITUDES is the main theme for the 12th edition of the EURAU 26 Symposium, hosted for the first time in the Nordics, in continuity with a tradition initiated in 2004 by Farid Ameziane as a platform for PhD schools in the field of architecture. The EURAU26 symposium will open a conversation between researchers across different latitudes on how themes are addressed in relation to situated contexts and critically reflect on the possibilities of this exchange.

We are delighted to welcome you to Umeå University's Arts Campus, which is our laboratory for practice, research and education. A part of the Faculty of Technology and Sciences, UMA is located alongside the Umeå Academy of Fine Arts, UID Umeå Design Institute and Bildmuseet, the university's contemporary art museum. The UMA building, designed by Henning Larsen with White Architects, is conceived as an open space where students, academic staff, administration and technicians constantly collaborate. Enabling and supporting collaborations across disciplines, departments and faculties, UmArts is Umeå University's research centre for Architecture, Design and the Arts. The centre creates an exciting interdisciplinary research environment in the visual arts, architecture, design, and creative educational studies.



LATITUDES

Maria Luna Nobile

ABOUT THE THEME

Lines of latitude, also called parallels, **are imaginary lines** that measure and divide the Earth. They are an invention, an instrumental tool to define our location in relation to space and time. Therefore, the notion of LATITUDE/S relates to the awareness of our relationship – as architects - with a specific context in a specific situated moment.

"Using instruments already made famous by ancient astronomers, one measures the height of a celestial body above the horizon, calculates the distance from the zenith, and—knowing its declination—because zenith distance plus or minus declination yields latitude, one can instantly determine which parallel one is on, that is, how far north or south one is from a known point."

"Seems straightforward."

"Within a child's grasp..."

In *The Island of the Day Before* (1994), Umberto Eco examines the method of determining latitude through the reflections and dialogues of the novel's protagonist, using astronomical instruments. This discussion, attributed to Colbert, highlights the relative simplicity of measuring latitude, as a relatively simple procedure, whereas longitude - that determines the notion of the day-before - remained "a mystery," notoriously difficult to resolve. Eco employs this contrast to explore deeper questions about knowledge, perception, and the authority of science - a conceptual framework that is one of the starting points for the thematic line of the EURAU26 LATITUDES symposium.

This conceptual framework is a human construct, designed to establish precise measurements and relationships among places, contexts, and peoples, and to situate the Earth in relation to other celestial bodies, foremost among them the Sun. It is on the basis of this construction, through cartography and other relational frameworks, that architectural research has historically grounded its methods and inquiries. The notion of parallel as a line that determines multiple latitudes is a concept that reflects the peculiar conditions of the place where the EURAU26 symposium will take place.

“For those who inhabit it, the North is home. It is neither remote, isolated, nor distant; it stands as the center of one’s own world, the primary point of observation. To me, the arbitrariness of the 60th parallel is precisely its strength, making it an ideal framework for exploring the North. The parallel is neither a line of strict measurement nor a rigid boundary between places. It does not seek to define; instead, it enables the coexistence of multiple Norths, acknowledging the diversity of experiences, landscapes, and perspectives that shape this region.”

It is the clear image given by Malachy Tallack in its book *Sixty Degrees North: Around the World in Search of Home* (2016). In specific the zone between the 60° N and the north pole has something specific in relation to the way territories could be considered as part of the same region, in relation to climatic conditions and to some specific relations among its human and non-human inhabitants, for example in relation to migration and movement of indigenous populations (Tallack, 2016). The Sápmi territories are an example, close to our specific condition and location. These conditions are changing gradually, getting closer to the Equator, where the distances have also had an impact on how cultures have evolved due to movements of people and cultures. It is also relevant to underline how the 60° S latitude encircles the Earth entirely

over ocean, not encountering any land, marking the northern boundary of the Southern Ocean and the Antarctic System. In this sense, architects are asked to relate to the context, learning and experimenting, facing specific climatic circumstances and situations of the environment, and this is even more important nowadays in relation to the current challenges due to climate change. This also entangles the concept of the nomadic as a subject, we – as architects, researchers, educators – navigate between cultures, traditions and environmental conditions, understanding the notion of context as relational rather than fixed and flat (Bradotti, 2013).

Our relation – as architects - to the concept of latitude consists in considering the observer as their own instrument of observation, in analogy with the ethnographic notion of exploring the “other-than-self” as the foundation for self-knowledge, and therefore as the starting point of any possible exploration (Coccia, 2021). Clearly, it is necessary to learn to know oneself. It is only by engaging with other cultures that one discovers something about oneself (Lévi-Strauss, 1973). Thus, the concept explored by EURAU26 LATITUDES, seeks to connect research in architecture with our own positioning as researchers in relation to other disciplinary traditions, contexts, places, and practices. In this sense, what becomes crucial is not only the relation to the point of view - for example, in Europe, the Mediterranean Basin and the Nordic-Baltic countries rely on entirely different references, as well as recurring themes of investigation - but also the encounter between networks of researchers, educators, and schools of architecture involved. This is even more relevant when looking at Northern and Southern latitudes crossing different situations.

Considering the current condition of urgency of the world we are living in, this call also underlines the need to go beyond the European border and open a dialogue between Northern and Southern latitudes. EURAU26 sets itself the goal of providing a necessary moment for broadening the outlook on architectural research in relation to its context.

Research in Architecture can be conceived as a situated practice, linking to the tradition of studies, cultures, climatic and contextual

conditions. EURAU26 LATITUDES aims at investigating the field of architecture as a research discipline across cultures, territories and places. The concepts of knowledge, movements and descriptions – embedded in the architectural discipline – relates to the notion of understanding latitudes in term of openness and movement (Ingold, 2011). The notion of latitude is artificial, it is an invention of one specific cultural perspective, as well as the notion of *global* often compared to the concept of *local*. In contemporary philosophy, the concept of the “planetary” has been introduced as an alternative to “the global”, considered as static, flat and Eurocentric. There is an astronomical “planetary” and a political-philosophical “planetary”, and while they are different, they should both inspire correspondence and mutual reinforcement. The conclusion is that planets can think through the life they evolve, not that thinking landed on our planet. (Bratton, 2024). From a “new materialist perspective”, cities are living assemblages, composed of humans, materials, non-human life, and infrastructures interacting dynamically, which requires architecture to account for these active relationships embracing agency as an act of responsibility (Braidotti, 2013). Therefore, we would like with this Symposium to offer the possibility to change the perspective by turning the globe upside-down, to break the lines, redraw new cartographies and embrace diversity.

When thinking about ourselves as researchers situated in a specific location and bridging in many cases traditions of studies and previous experiences related to a specific context, it is evident that there is a gap in the way we could learn from other latitudes, context/s and situations.

Concepts should not arise from the perspective of a single individual, but from the many viewpoints that emerge from multiple people, cultures, and even nations. What truly matters is that knowledge is born from plurality. Only then will we know how far we wish to go. This idea, defined by the notion of “cosmic diplomacy” (Latour, 2012), seeks to understand the ways in which we are part of an emerging world, in order to outline a shared path for acting within the cosmos—through an ecological vision capable of holding together all living beings and the natural environment to which they belong (Kohn, 2013).

The concept of *situation* is no longer tied simply to the idea of ground. It is not to be understood as in the traditional definition of “regional” in relation to local practices (Frampton, 1965), but as in the metaphor of ground or forest, also mentioned by Kohn: a living environment composed of bio-species, yet at the same time polluted, modified, occupied, shaped by climate change and political and regulated logics. Ground thus emerges as a highly dynamic condition—both real and virtual—continuously transformed by drifting cultures and by a sense of openness and freedom (Otero Verzier, 2019).

This reflection also applies to cities - artificial environments par excellence. A city is not just architecture plus dwellers; it is perhaps the longest continuous process that humans have created. What future would make the past worth it? Taking this new existential condition seriously demands a radically different sort of philosophy (Bratton, 24). It is in these distinctions among cultures, political frameworks, current emergent conditions, and in the ability of understanding the many layers cities are composed of, that we invite the authors to participate to the debate.

The Symposium wants to challenge the notion of architecture as a situated practice, looking beyond the traditional understanding of context as territory and embracing an open vision towards the future possibilities where the notion of context is not static anymore but dynamic, open, real and virtual, but still enrooted in the specificity of a precise, measured intervention. It is in relation to this intercultural and interdisciplinary plurality that EURAU26 LATITUDES positions itself as a platform for exchange, understanding, dialogue, and the advancement of knowledge within the field. What tools, methods, instruments, frameworks, can other realities, including close disciplines and knowledges offer to architecture?

Emphasizing the importance of understanding architectural research as a practice situated across multiple contexts, disciplines, and cultural viewpoints and by acknowledging these relational frameworks, EURAU26 LATITUDES encourage a research approach that is rigorous in measurement yet attentive to the diversity of perspectives that shape the world we inhabit.

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SITUATED REFLECTIONS

Maria Luna Nobile, Carla Collevocchio

THE CALL FOR PAPER

The EURAU 26 symposium aims to stimulate reflection and to strengthen collaboration between European Schools of Architecture and research groups in Europe, and to reinforce the importance of architectural research being situated and related to different latitudes. This also means to position architecture as a field of research in relation to current challenges, not just focusing on sustainability at large, but looking at ecology and its implications in relation to socio-political questions and urgent conditions due to climate change, and migrations and the necessity to be able to respond to a wider range of questions.

How does LATITUDE influence architecture as a practice? How does research in architecture relate to the specific condition of LATITUDE? How does the context/s we are living in influence the way we educate future architects?

In architecture, research topics are mostly related to the context in which we live. In many cases, we have the opportunity to relate to other contexts. The EURAU 26 symposium proposes a platform for expanding this discussion.

The 12th symposium follows the three main lines of investigation of previous events, reflecting on the following transversal aspects:

EDUCATION: There is a constant need to reflect on the role of academia and architectural pedagogy in response to the current needs of society and climate. It is important for universities to be aligned and to constantly be updated and learn from each other. What local and global conditions are to be addressed in relation to socio-cultural values and political perspectives, and how is architecture responding to these conditions at different latitudes?

RESEARCH: Research in architecture has historically been closely tied to the concept of context. How are its theories and methods specific to each context of study? What situated

conditions in the field of architecture derive from the influence of studies from different latitudes?

ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE: As a practice-based discipline, architecture can provide space for debate and constant experimentation. How are the contemporary practices responding to local and contextual urgencies? What are the possible interactions and exchanges among practices at different latitudes? What can we learn from other conditions?

THREE CATEGORIES & FOUR THEMATIC TRACKS

Contributions are welcome in the form of extended abstracts, including but not limited to scientific outcomes, research by design, pedagogical experiments, artistic contributions, and practice-based explorations. Submissions must align with one of the four thematic tracks and may be framed within the three categories of Education, Research, or Architectural Practice. The symposium invites contributions at the intersection of three categories and four thematic tracks. Contributions should underline how the topic proposed relates to or challenges the notion of latitude/s and indicate the specificity of the point of view.

THEMATIC TRACKS

Embodied Practices

Urban and Contextual Practices

Environmental And Landscape Practices

Material And Tectonic Practices

The results of this call are included in the conference proceedings.

The definition of each thematic track can be found in detail in the conference proceedings.

Umeå, June 2026.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

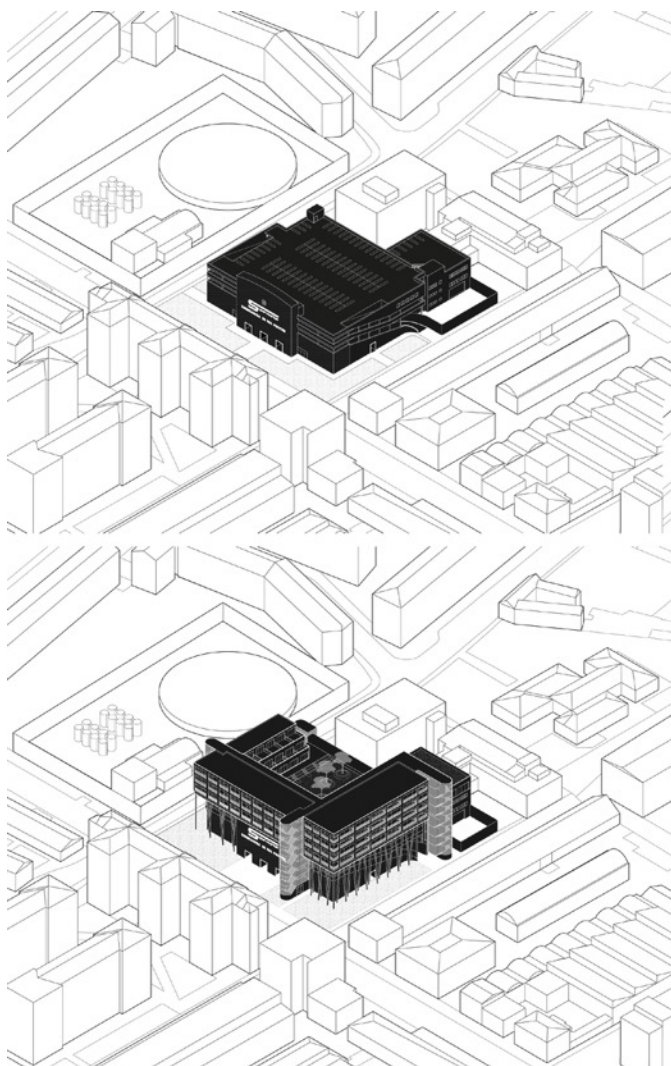


Fig. 1. Example of 'Super-Housing' from graduate design studio, 2024.
Supermarket 'Esselunga', Viale Feltre, Milano. Students: L. Bona. V. Bruno.

Super-Housing. Densifying the City from Above: A Design Investigation into New Inhabitable Grounds over Large-Scale Commercial Structures

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Across many European and Western cities, the housing question has become a structural condition rather than a temporary emergency. Rising housing costs, the contraction of long-term rental markets, and the widening gap between incomes and living expenses increasingly restrict access to adequate housing for broad segments of the population. These dynamics, observable across different latitudes and socio-economic contexts, have become central to local political agendas, while also reactivating disciplinary questions related to density, land, typology, infrastructure, and forms of inhabitation. Milan represents a particularly acute case. Recent studies such as the OCA Report (Osservatorio Casa Abbordabile) describe a growing mismatch between slowly increasing wages and rapidly rising housing costs, with direct effects on the city's ability to retain students, young workers, essential service workers, and middle-income households. In response, the Municipality of Milan has launched the Extraordinary Housing Plan (Piano Straordinario per la Casa), aimed at increasing the supply of affordable housing through the mobilisation of publicly owned sites suitable for development, confirming land availability as a crucial lever for housing policy. However, as in many consolidated cities, the availability of developable public land is limited, and strategies to expand affordable housing increasingly depend on residual plots or marginal conditions. Against this backdrop, the paper poses a more specific question: how can the availability of land for housing policies be increased? Is it possible to work on existing urban supports that are already built yet underused in sectional

terms? And, if so, what would be the design implications at both the architectural and urban scale? The paper advances the hypothesis that the flat rooftops of large-scale commercial structures can be reinterpreted as supports for new residential grounds, enabling a form of vertical densification over already saturated sites.

The paper's main contribution, therefore, is to articulate and test Super-Housing as a spatial strategy for producing new grounds for affordable housing, while clarifying the constructive, morphological, and regulatory conditions under which such a strategy may prove plausible. The extended abstract should include a consistent focus, clear definition of the research framework and methodology, and give a deep understanding of the subject or topic described, including findings, reflections, and conclusions.

RESEARCH BY DESIGN AS AN EVIDENCE-GENERATING DEVICE

The investigation is situated within the framework of research by design and treats architectural design as a knowledge-producing procedure rather than as the mere illustration of pre-defined solutions. In this study, design is not used to demonstrate feasibility in any absolute sense, but to construct comparable scenarios through which compatibilities, frictions, and consequences can be made visible. More precisely, the paper interprets research by design as a form of controlled comparative inquiry: by holding a common question constant and testing it across different sites, morphological conditions, and building configurations, the project produces situated yet transferable knowledge about a form of densification that would otherwise be difficult to explore. The research was developed within a graduate-level architectural design studio at the Politecnico di Milano and is based on a corpus of ten exploratory projects developed for an equal number of large-scale commercial sites across the city. These sites are not treated as a statistically representative sample, but as morphological testing grounds that force the same strategy to confront different urban fabrics, sectional conditions, and relationships between building, edge, and public space. Within

this framework, the projects function as demonstrative devices through which structural, distributive, constructive, atmospheric, and regulatory issues can be comparatively assessed. Through the development of scenarios, some of them intentionally radical, research by design is used to test an idea that is at once unusual and complex, clarifying its potential benefits, constraints, and conflicts.

FINDINGS FROM THE DESIGN SCENARIOS

The design scenarios show that rooftop densification over large-scale commercial structures does not constitute a generic or universally applicable solution, but rather a selective and integrated urban strategy. From a structural point of view, the projects show that transforming a roof into a new inhabitable ground entails a change of regime: from technical surface to load-bearing platform. The plausibility of this operation depends on the performance of the existing roof, the logic of the structural system, the available load paths, and the possibility of combining different support strategies, including selective strengthening of the existing structure, independent frames, transfer devices, or concentrated supports in new cores. The evidence that emerges is therefore less a straightforward proof of feasibility than a map of compatibilities between roof capacity, structural typology, and possible forms of addition. From a spatial point of view, the scenarios show that the main challenge lies not only in adding housing above retail, but in making residential, commercial, and logistical uses coexist without conflict. The most effective schemes rely on the careful separation of flows, on perimeter or multi-stage access systems, and on elevated distributive devices capable of connecting the street to a new urban level above the commercial plinth. In many cases, access cannot be resolved simply by bringing every stair directly to the ground; instead, the projects reveal the importance of two-stage circulation systems, in which an initial ascent reaches the new rooftop ground and a horizontal distribution system then connects additional stairs, galleries, and residential entrances. Distribution thus becomes a decisive urban and architectural issue rather than a secondary technical problem.

From a constructive point of view, the corpus highlights recurring

material hierarchies and their morphological consequences. Steel and concrete tend to be necessary for the most demanding load-bearing elements, such as transfer structures, primary frames, and reinforced platforms, whereas lighter modular systems are better suited to the repetitive residential parts in order to reduce permanent loads. Morphologically, the scenarios suggest that these large commercial footprints can often absorb additional volume as well as, if not better than, many vacant plots. Since commercial buildings typically saturate urban volume at lower levels, they often appear as “missing teeth” within perimeter blocks or as disproportionately horizontal urban fields. Building above them can therefore produce not only new housing capacity, but also a partial morphological repair of existing urban fabrics. At the same time, the projects make limits, conflicts, and trade-offs explicit. The strategy is constrained by the need to operate on buildings that remain in use, by uncertainties that exceed preliminary structural sizing, and by unresolved executive issues, such as MEP systems, construction phasing, fire safety, and long-term management, which were addressed only marginally in this research. From an urban point of view, the interventions assign a new role to large-scale retail in the city, countering the anti-urban conditions it often expresses: oversized footprints, mono-functional programmes, and introverted spatial configurations despite strategic locations and high infrastructural accessibility.

The investigation also brings to light socio-political and regulatory thresholds. Parking standards, additional development rights, and value-capture mechanisms cannot be treated as neutral issues: they become central to the implementation of rooftop housing and require selective derogations or negotiated agreements, so that additional density produces permanently affordable rental housing and urban improvement rather than mere private gain.

IMPLICATIONS AND TRANSFERABILITY

Although rooted in Milan, the paper is relevant to many cities characterised by housing pressure, land scarcity, and extensive mono-functional commercial structures. It argues that Super-Housing should be understood first and foremost as a transferable spatial strategy, and only secondarily as a possible policy device.

Its implementation would depend on negotiated public-private arrangements capable of tying additional density to verifiable social returns, including affordable rental housing, shared services, and the improvement of urban edges. Methodologically, the paper shows that research by design can produce a specific kind of knowledge: not universal solutions, but a repertoire of imaginaries, spatial principles, constraints, and scenarios that makes a possible urban transformation discussable in concrete terms.

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The EURAU26 LATITUDES symposium is hosted by Umeå School of Architecture and within the Research Group Designing the contemporary city, led by Maria Luna Nobile.

EURAU 26 LATITUDES Conference chairs:

Maria Luna Nobile, scientific responsible, Umeå University

Carla Collevocchio, co-responsible, Umeå University

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This publication is dedicated to the ones dreaming every day in a better world.