

**Practice Matters:
Engaging Communities**

Practice Matters is a project inquiring, highlighting and discussing design, craft, architecture, spatial and urban practice, and their ability to act in relation to present urgent issues of crisis and conflicts. This public event, taking place on the occasion of the 18th Istanbul Biennale 2025, brings together practitioners to discuss how to organise rural and urban communities in response to shared social and environmental challenges.

Participants include **Volkan Büyükgüngör, Evrim Çoksöyler, Emre Rona, Maria Richter Simsek** and **Bediz Yılmaz**, introduction and moderation by **Magnus Ericson** and **Eylül Şenses**.

This gathering focuses on practices that in different ways engage in issues of land use and ecology, agriculture and food production, in a time of late capitalist modernity. The programme seeks to reflect on often overlooked aspects of collective work, including negotiating differences between diverse constituencies, navigating conflicts, and establishing shared ground. It highlights examples of practice and discuss how to organise, adapt and evolve participatory approaches when working with diverse communities and perspectives. Participants share their strategies for extending engagement, experimenting with inclusive methods and developing new forms of collaboration. Discussions also address the relationship between urban and rural contexts, considering how different practices can engage with and learn from one another through sharing knowledge and experience.

**19 September 2025
5 – 8PM
Salt Galata, Workshop II-III
Bankalar Caddesi 11
Karaköy 34421 İstanbul, Turkey**

Planner and researcher **Evrin Çoksöyler**, and holistic management accredited trainer and field professional **Volkan Büyükgüngör**, work on various projects for Anatolian Grasslands, a social enterprise dedicated to strengthening climate change mitigation and adaptation processes by creating regenerative systems. In this event they share their experiences from the Resilient Steppes project, a biodiversity offset initiative carried out in several villages across the brittle grassland environments of Sivas, Eskişehir, Bursa, and Kütahya. While the same project framework was introduced in each location, its application was adapted to the unique context of each community involved. Through a participatory approach, communal grazing conventions were redesigned from a holistic planned grazing perspective, and concrete steps were taken to restore the health of the grasslands. Drawing on collaborations with rural communities transitioning from conventional agriculture to regenerative practices, they discuss the challenges faced, lessons learned, and insights into engaging communities in the field of regenerative agriculture. Their focus is on exploring whether, and how, managing complexity through holistic approaches can enable meaningful change, and what this means for our role in regenerating the environments that sustain our lives.

Landscape designer and permaculture practitioner **Emre Rona** shares his experience working on environmental problems and community engagement in Datça, a small town on the Aegean coast of Türkiye. Reverse migration (from urban to rural) has become a common and accelerating phenomenon during the last couple of decades, resulting in new social dynamics with many benefits, but also causing conflicts between locals and newcomers. Together with a small group of people he has initiated and managed small projects, focusing mainly on environmental problems and approaches such as local food production, community supported agriculture, protection of water sources (rainwater harvesting and wastewater reuse), housing issues and stray animals. As this often resulted in conflicts between the group itself and locals, including authorities, it became clear that a new way of communication was necessary. They started participating in working groups within the volunteer group City Council, trying to find ways of helping the local authorities with knowledge, expertise and work force. The initiative follows the municipality's actions, communicating these with relevant civil parties and somehow acting as a negotiation team as well as organizing events and managing outsourced projects.

Designer **Maria Richter Simsek** is working within the fields of social and environmental change and rural development in Sweden. At the heart of her work is designing processes, structures and new traditions that support small rural communities to drive long-term development together. Through her work she investigates how we can build or curate infrastructure for local participation and influence to transform social norms, how to create space to unlearn current dominating practices of care for nature and re-learn new ones on a structural and perceptual level. She looks at how to design processes where the river or forest and more than humans have influence in decisions when landscapes are changing. Here she shares her experience of building communities of practice in between villages and shaping infrastructures for collective learning as a village. Her ongoing work is about the conditions of the rural forests and the social norms and practices of care that shape them and our relationships.

Researcher and agriculture practitioner **Bediz Yılmaz** is currently involved in urban agriculture at one of Istanbul's historic bostans (gardens), the Piyalepaşa Orchard in Beyoğlu, and with the organisation Fair Food Communities. For centuries, agricultural lands shaped the city's landscape, but over the past 50–60 years Istanbul has rapidly yielded to concrete: bostans gave way to apartment blocks, streams were buried beneath roads, and even the remaining fields on the outskirts have come under real estate

pressure. Today, while urban agriculture has re-emerged as part of a global trend, the practice in Istanbul's bostans remains distinct in its form, content, and political approach. This practice honors a 500-year-old tradition and craft, keeping the heritage alive and passing its knowledge and skills to future generations. She shares her experience as a volunteer working with the bostan and from the small, diverse community that works to ensure the survival of the Piyalepaşa Orchard, and its counterparts in Yedikule. Their efforts range from negotiating with the municipality and documenting archaeological heritage to raising public awareness, creating market spaces for its produce through a food community, organising visits to the garden, and sustaining agricultural production through their own labour. Through these experiences, she reflects on her perspective on persisting with this practice despite challenges, her motivation within the community, and how she views its significance.

Practice Matters: Engaging Communities is organised as a collaboration between IASPIS and Salt, on the occasion of the 18th Istanbul Biennale 2025. The programme is curated by **Magnus Ericson** and **Eylül Şenses**.

Volkan Büyükgüngör is the co-founder of Anatolian Grasslands, an internationally accredited trainer and field professional with the Savory Institute. He is also the co-founder and a former resident of the Ormanevi Collective. Between 2014 and 2019 he managed the Anatolian Grasslands' application site, overseeing a pasture-based cattle and sheep enterprise on more than 200 acres of land, and mentoring paid interns during their apprenticeships. At Anatolian Grasslands, he provides training, consultancy services, and coordinates large-scale, multi-partner, and multi-stakeholder steppe restoration projects.

Evrin Çoksöyler is a planner and researcher based in İzmir. She works with civil society organisations in various roles, focusing on ecology and regenerative agriculture. She has been trained in permaculture design, composting, soil microbiology and holistic management. She mainly works with Anatolian Grasslands, the Savory Institute's hub in Türkiye, where she received her training in holistic management. In 2021, she became a certified Ecological Outcome Verification (EOV) monitor through the Savory Institute. Learning the language of the land through ecosystem process indicators, she observes grasslands and reports on their condition, which informs regeneration efforts.

Emre Rona is a landscape designer and permaculture practitioner based in Datça. Since 2010, he has been engaged in theoretical and

applied permaculture work, teaching, advising, and developing simple yet effective nature-based techniques for creating holistic landscapes. His focus areas include rain-water harvesting, wastewater reuse, erosion control, organic waste management, and food production. He has been consulting for NGOs and is a member of various working groups under the City Council of Datça Municipality – a volunteer initiative that seeks to support local authorities with knowledge, expertise, and labour.

Maria Richter Simsek is a designer based in southern Sweden, working in rural development and social and environmental change. She is interested in how social design and visualisation can support community development, and in the power of collaborative learning for mobilizing change. Her practice is rooted in process design, graphic facilitation, and participatory design, with experience leading projects such as Lärande Bygd (Learning Village), Permapilot, and Aktiva byar (Active Villages). Her current focus is on the conditions of the rural forests and the social norms and practices of care that shape them.

Bediz Yılmaz is a researcher and agriculture practitioner based in Istanbul. She has a background in public administration, political science, and urban studies, with a PhD on forced migration and social exclusion in a slum neighbourhood of Istanbul. Following her dismissal after signing the Academics for

Peace declaration, she shifted her focus to ecology and agriculture. She is currently engaged in urban agriculture at the Piyalepaşa Orchard in Istanbul, advises various NGOs, moderates the Fair Food Community initiated by Postane, and serves as one of two instructors for the program The New Urbanite's Guide to Ecological Living.

Eylül Şenses is a programmer at Salt Research and Programs, Istanbul. Her practice focuses on urban and rural commons, spatial and environmental justice with an emphasis on socially and politically engaged practices. She is a member of the Urban Studies Cooperative (Urban.koop), a collective network of urbanists, artists, and creatives who are willing to co-develop urban policies, programs, and projects for the local communities. Additionally, she is a co-founder of ANATOPIA,

a cooperative that embraces the extended geography we inhabit as a deep time and expansive ground, aiming to reestablish the narrative with hope. She is a co-curator of Practice Matters.

Magnus Ericson is Head of IASPIS Applied Arts, leading the program related to design, crafts, architecture, spatial and urban practice. He is a Stockholm-based curator and educator working across design, architecture, urbanism, and art. He has over the years, in different institutional settings and as an independent curator, combined curatorial and pedagogical practice with an emphasis on socially engaged critical practice, alternative pedagogies and organising spaces for learning. He is the founder and co-curator of the IASPIS projects Urgent Pedagogies and Practice Matters.

Practice Matters is a project and platform for inquiring, highlighting and discussing design, architecture, spatial and urban practice and its ability to act in relation to present urgent issues of crisis and conflicts. It aims to respond to an urgent need to discuss how artistic practices may organise and act in response to global challenges – from climate change and ecological collapses, geopolitical and economic crisis and displacement of people to issues of democracy, social justice and equality. The project engages with practices acting between and across artistic and civic society practice, social movements and activism, research and pedagogies, and explores the role of cultural and educational institutions and organisations. **Practice Matters** unfolds through meetings, public events and publishing. In bringing together a plurality of practices, fields of knowledge and experiences, the project aims to serve as a common space and resource to discuss, think together, (un-)learn and re-think the role and possibilities of design, architecture, spatial and urban practice today.

Practice Matters is an IASPIS project, developed and pursued in collaboration with Salt. The project is curated by **Magnus Ericson** and **Eylül Şenses**.