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**LEYLA ACAROGLU, USING  
NATURE AS A LEARNING  
LAB FOR SOCIAL CHANGE  
MAKERS**

28 August 2018

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# LEYLA ACAROGLU, USING NATURE AS A LEARNING LAB FOR SOCIAL CHANGE MAKERS

28 August 2018

*Leyla Acaroglu is a disruptive designer, social scientist and serial entrepreneur. She has founded the [UnSchool of Disruptive Design](#), and two design agencies, [Disrupt Design](#) and [Eco Innovators](#). Through her [TED talk](#) on sustainability and UNEP Champion of the Earth title, she has become an international activist on sustainable issues.*

*As part of our Co-living Series, we spoke with Leyla about the power of design to better co-exist with nature and her latest project – the [Co-Project](#) where an old olive farm is transformed it into a living learning lab and creative retreat space for social change makers.*



*Image source: [www.leylaacaroglu.com](http://www.leylaacaroglu.com)*

## **Design is a powerful tool for sculpting our surroundings**

We are all in a dynamic relationship with this designed world. We design the world and in turn, it designs us. The way we plan and design communities, be it cities or rural environments, has far reaching impacts both on the health of inhabitants and the natural environment

which we need to sustain life. Along with that, there are also impacts to our cultures that emerge from within these designed spaces.

So many decisions made around the design of cities comes from a linear perspective, based on efficiency and economic gains rather than community, sustainability and thriveability. From the way we lay out roads, to urban architecture designed to influence behavior, we shape our cultures and societies through the design of the city.

### **Protecting nature is about protecting humans**



All humans need air - no one is beyond this very biological necessity, and air pollution is one of the biggest killers of humans globally. When we talk about protecting nature, we often assume it's about 'other' species such as bees, trees or polar bears, when actually it is just as much about us. Most of the negative impacts that we have on the planet come from the associated activities of consumption – be it our cell phones or the pizza we had for dinner. Everything that is created takes from nature and returns pollutants

unless we change the way we conceptualize how to meet human needs in the varying forms of goods and services. Understanding the cycle of life as well as circular and systems thinking, and applying these to design decisions so that more holistic and transformative decisions are made, is crucial.

### **The Co-Project, a living lab for exploring how nature works**



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*I wanted to learn from nature and immerse myself in an environment that would help me learn how nature solves problems. Everything is interconnected, and this concept became very real to me when I started working in sustainability and systems change. However, I could see that I really had no idea how nature makes its magic happen.*

Leyla took on an old abandoned olive farm in central Portugal and restored the old farm house into a beautiful brain spa for creative optimists, [the Co-Project](#). There, she runs creative residencies, design camps and [UnSchool](#) workshops, along with hosting other facilitators who are interested in activating positive social and environmental change by design.

**“ The Co-Project is based on the concepts I teach such as the [Disruptive Design](#) Method and has thrown me many curve balls and creative challenges. My goal is to create a cultural destination that provides a beautiful, contemporary example of sustainable and regenerative design**

Watch [A Brain Spa for Creative Optimists](#) video



# ABOUT

## LEYLA ACAROGLU

*Sustainability provocateur and cultural protagonist Dr. Leyla Acaroglu challenges people to think differently about how the world works. As an award winning designer, UNEP Champion of the Earth, sociologist, and entrepreneur, she developed the Disruptive Design Method and designs cerebrally activating experiences, gamified toolkits, and unique educational experiences that help people make the status quo obsolete. Her mainstage TED talk on sustainability has been viewed over a million times, and she leads presentations around the world on activating positive social change through creative interventions and systems thinking.*

*Website to Leyla's projects*

<https://unschools.co/>

<https://www.coproject.co/>

*Personal website and social media*

<https://www.leylaacaroglu.com>

<https://twitter.com/LeylaAcaroglu>

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