

SPACE

RE:PUBLIC

9

ESSAYS

for
Change
Landscape
Urban Planning.

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WHY WE OPEN SPACE DO NEED PLANNING?

09

Essays for a Change
in Landscape and Urban
Planning.

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FOREWORD

Listening. To achieve the goals of Open space planning.

Dear readers: the connection between open space planning, architecture, unsealing, water management and quality of life is a particularly challenging task for designers all around the world. As a company dedicated to durability and sustainability with high-quality lighting solutions and urban furniture, we would like to support the international discussion about the future design of open spaces with this program. The generic term for this responsibility with regard to climate change, extreme weather and the necessary processes of transformation is

RE:PUBLIC SPACE

This powerfully symbolic term fits in with the approach of using natural resources more responsibly – and placing a greater focus than ever before on how constructed spaces influence climate change.

We are very familiar with high-quality products that stand for durability and long-term value retention. But when it comes to designing and implementing resilient city neighbourhoods, urban spaces to protect living beings and plants as well as leisure areas for residents in their local context – here we rely on the expertise of the most skilled specialists. This requires an ability that we have always cultivated very intensively in our corporate mission: knowing how to listen!

Approaching the concept of open space planning? The “Campus LIEVEN” residential complex in Amsterdam is unsealed, green and easily accessible.

Photo:
BEGA



Public spaces belong to the people and involve managing a variety of challenges. A RE:PUBLIC SPACE combines architecture, urban spaces and recreational facilities – with a focus on unsealing spaces. In line with this concept, we have requested specialists active world-wide both in theory and practice to outline their ideas.

What are the particular challenges? How can varying interests and similarly aligned ambitions join together to protect people and the environment? Are there positive examples that can serve as a blueprint? Are there steps that might seem utopian today that can be reliably implemented tomorrow?

We are very pleased that this weighty list of questions have inspired experts to offer us all their analysis and proposed solutions.

With this international program, we are continuing the discussion that we started in Germany in 2024. Thousands of experts in Germany now follow the discussion on the public channels that were made available. Join us on a quick trip around the world of inspiration to RE:PUBLIC SPACE.

What challenges arise in a densely populated city like Barcelona when redesigning urban streets? How can a city state like Singapore rethink the topic of rainwater? Numerous statistics drawn from international studies complement the authors' contributions. Interviews with prominent figures Bruno Marques, President of the International Federation of Landscape Architects, and Carlo Ratti, Curator of Architecture Biennale Venice 2025, round off the agenda for RE:PUBLIC SPACE.

Hopefully, all contributions will provide further ideas and inspirations. In this way we can find out – including our role as a manufacturer – what's expected of us. These expectations come from our partners as well as society. We are certainly all aware that the journey will be long and challenging.

I hope you enjoy reading!

Heinrich Gantenbrink

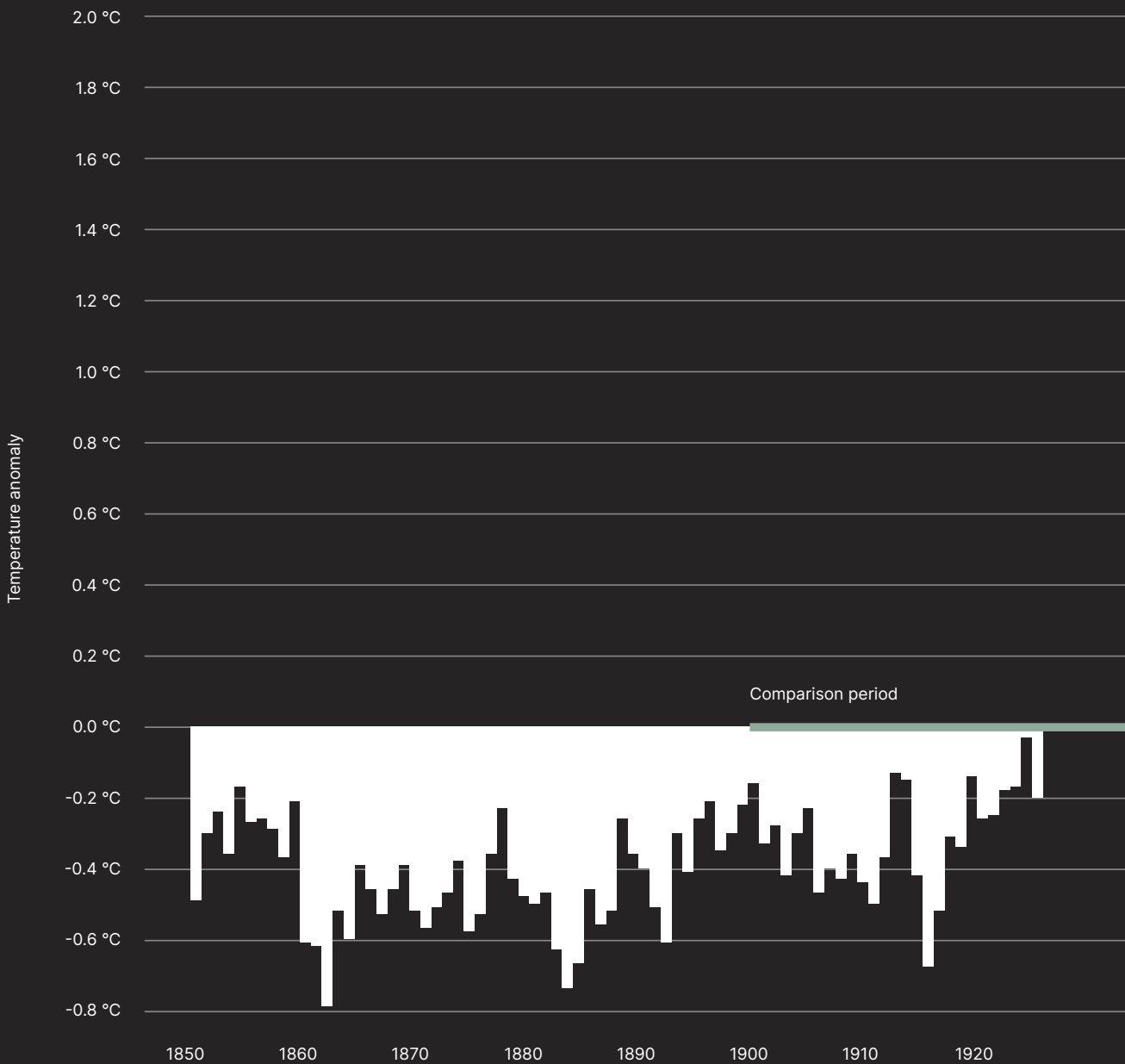
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Photo:
BEGA

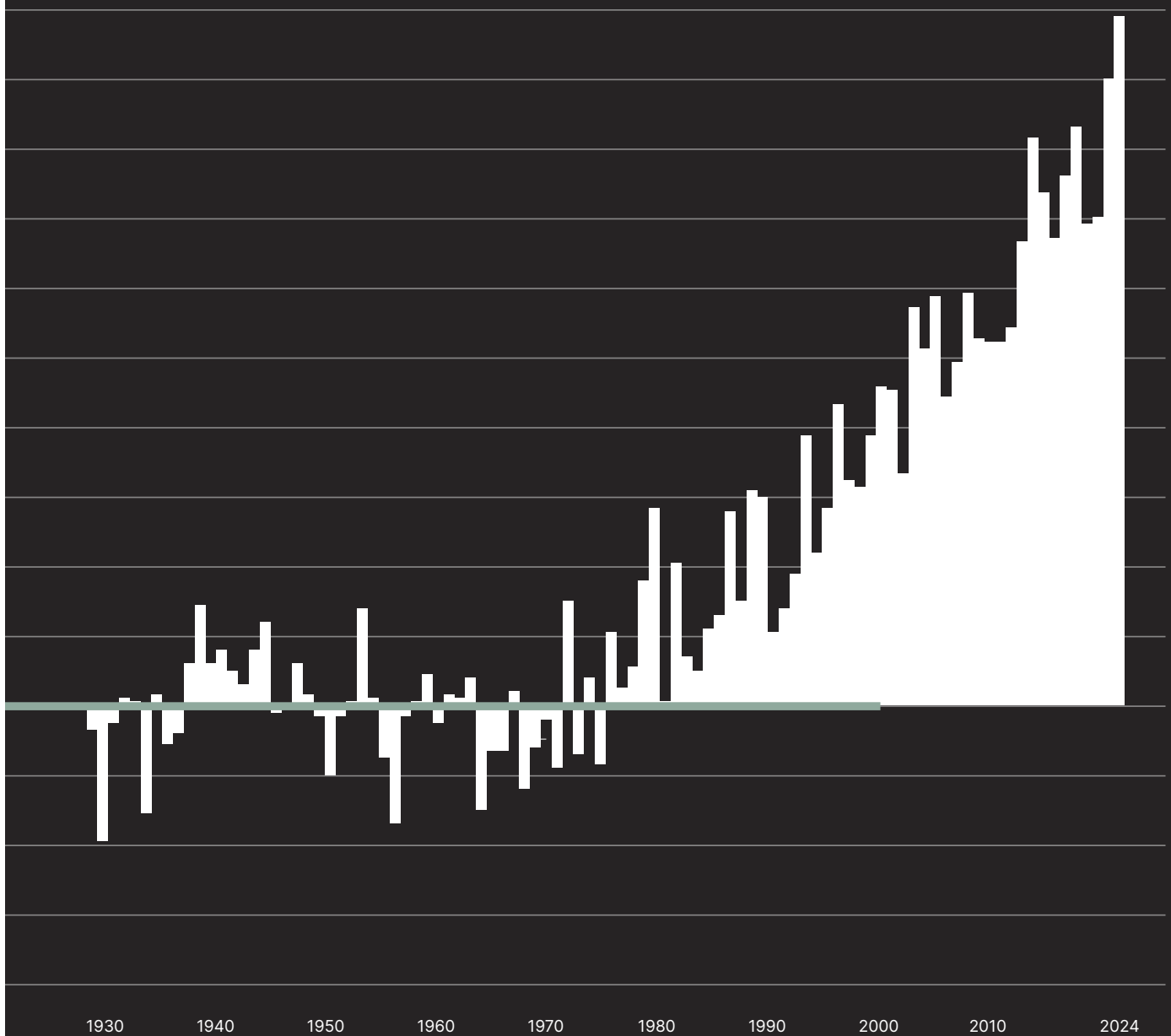


CLIMATE CHANGES | TEMPERATURE ANOMALIES SINCE 1850.

To ensure a successful climate transition, it is essential to transform open space planning. Long-term analysis of climate trends highlights how urgent this is.



Average annual global temperature anomalies from 1850 to 2024



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„STOP PREACHING – START DEMONSTRATING“

An interview with Bruno Marques, President of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA)

As President of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA), Dr. Bruno Marques represents over 100,000 landscape architects worldwide. In his work, he emphasizes the central role of landscapes in addressing global challenges such as the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and increasing urbanization. For him, every sustainable design begins with the landscape – not as an after-thought, but as a fundamental starting point.

QUESTION

Professor Marques, as President of IFLA, you represent landscape architects around the world. What role does the profession play globally today – especially facing the problems of climate change, urbanisation and biodiversity loss?

ANSWER

That's a question I get quite often – even from within our own membership. IFLA is a global federation of professional bodies. We were founded in 1948 and today represent around 80 countries, with over 100,000 landscape architects worldwide. The profession has changed significantly over time – and continues to evolve. Its status also varies greatly by country. In some places, it's a highly regulated profession. In others, it's still in its early stage of development. There are countries where there is little to no awareness of what landscape architecture actually is. That's why we do a lot of advocacy and education work. A widespread misconception – across many cultures – is that we're just gardeners or landscapers. But in truth, landscape architecture deals with some of the biggest challenges humanity is facing: biodiversity, providing climate resilience, food security and children-friendly cities, dealing with urban flooding and aging societies. We work at the intersection of ecology, design, planning, and policy. It's a broad scope for just one discipline but it makes perfect sense. Everything happens on top of a landscape. Nothing floats in outer space. Life unfolds on living systems: our environment.

So part of our mission is to strengthen our consciousness. And that includes work with the United Nations. We showcase what landscape architecture can do – by presenting successful strategies and real-world examples. The hope is that if we influence thinking at the UN level, this thinking will eventually filter down to national policies and local practice.

Guangzhou, China, where large-scale green and blue corridors have redefined urban resilience. In just a decade, the megacity restored wetlands, forests, and rivers – demonstrating how nature-based solutions can lead the way in climate adaptation.

Photo:
Mathias Apitz | flickr | CC BY-ND 2.0



QUESTION

You mentioned your work with the UN. What does that engagement look like in practice?

ANSWER

In the last three years, I've been working closely with various UN bodies. The challenge is: landscape architecture is incredibly broad, which means we must engage with multiple UN departments – sometimes seven or eight at once. We began our work with UN-Habitat, which focuses on urban development. They're very action-oriented, which allowed us to make some early progress. We're also working with the UN-Environment Programme, where engagement is more complex but equally important. The UN gives us a platform to advocate for the profession – especially in places where support, training and formal recognition are lacking. It's a space where we can help build capacity, both through education and professional development. Because unless you're present at the table, you don't exist. If we're not there, no one knows what we offer.

QUESTION

How does the concept of nature-based solutions relate to your work?

ANSWER

In Europe, people often talk about “green and blue infrastructure” – green areas over here, blue areas over there. Nature-based solutions are much more holistic. They put nature first – not as an add-on, but as a foundation. One of the most impressive examples I've seen is in China. I visited the country twelve years ago, and then again two years ago. The difference was staggering. China faced enormous challenges – pollution, overpopulation, congested cities. And they responded by making nature a top priority. Take Guangzhou, for example. It's a megacity of 25 million people. In just ten years, they created six massive green and blue corridors – each the size of Hannover – restoring wetlands, forests and rivers, redesigning infrastructure to allow air flow, elevating buildings. They didn't just talk about nature. They performed straight away. That's the key: stop preaching, and start demonstrating. We need more large-scale, integrated examples like this – where nature truly leads the process.



The ancient Kauri tree Tāne Mahuta – “God of the Forest” to the Māori – is New Zealand’s oldest living tree and a powerful symbol of ecological interconnectedness. Its vast canopy hosts a rich biodiversity, including rare plants, small wetlands, and native frogs.

Photo:
itraveINZ® | flickr | CC BY 2.0

QUESTION

You’ve lived and worked in New Zealand for many years. What can the world learn from Indigenous knowledge about landscape?

ANSWER

So much. For me, working with Māori communities has been deeply transformative. The Māori view of nature is one of deep relation. They don’t try to control nature – they live with it, as part of it. Western thinking tends to dominate and exploit nature – and then we’re surprised when it turns against us. The Māori see the landscape as part of their identity. They say things like “I belong to this mountain” or “I am part of this river.” It’s not symbolic – it’s deeply real. The landscape defines who they are. They don’t separate physical, spiritual, mental and communal aspects – it’s all one system. If one part is out of balance, everything is.

Even flooding is seen differently. In the West, it’s a problem. But for the Māori, it’s a blessing – a way to restore the land. The same view existed in ancient Egypt. Floods of the Nile were used to refresh the soil. What moved me most: after a successful legal case against the government, a Māori tribe received financial compensation. What did they do with the money? They restored wetlands and native forests. They could have bought houses or cars – instead, they chose to heal the land. Because they understand: if the land is healthy, we are healthy.



At the northern tip of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Tasman Sea and the Pacific Ocean meet in a dramatic convergence of currents. For the Māori, this is where male and female waters come together—an ancestral union that symbolizes balance, regeneration, and the spiritual gateway between life and the afterlife.

Photo:
Hannah Schmidt

QUESTION

How can that knowledge be applied in highly urbanised Western contexts?

ANSWER

First, we need to rethink our approach. In architecture, the focus is often on the object – the building – and not the context. That's why the skylines of Singapore and Montreal can look almost identical, despite completely different climates. Landscape architecture is the opposite. It's always context-specific. We work with the local soil, climate, culture, plants, and people. We need to stop exporting generic solutions around the world. Instead, we must read the landscape – learn what is unique to each place. Why import marble from Turkey to New Zealand when we have beautiful local stone? Indigenous knowledge reminds us to ask: What belongs here? What works here? And that applies not just globally – but locally. You can't compare Hamburg to Munich. Or Auckland to Christchurch. Every site is different.

And there's another aspect: the construction industry is one of the biggest polluters on the planet. Even when using local materials, building something new has a footprint. So instead, let's focus on upcycling and reusing what we already have.



We need to stop exporting generic solutions around the world. Instead, we must read the landscape – learn what is unique to each place.



Quote: Dr. Bruno Marques

QUESTION

Let's end on a hopeful note: what gives you optimism about the future – for the planet and your profession?

ANSWER

What gives me hope is this: to save our planet and ourselves, we will need landscapes – and landscape architects. There's no way around that. Our profession matters, and I believe we will play a crucial role in shaping a liveable future. I also believe that in the years to come, cities will emerge that put landscapes first – cities that accommodate people of all ages, all backgrounds, and all needs, through spaces that are both ethically and ecologically sound.

Yes, the current situation is serious. But this is not the time for cleavage. We have one planet. There is no second Earth for different political parties or ideologies. If we fail to act, it won't be us who suffer most – it will be our children and grandchildren. And they're already scared. They're looking at an uncertain future. So let's get serious. Let's stop repeating what we already know and start sharing the solutions that are already working. Let's give landscape its rightful place – not as a second thought, but as the foundation for everything we build.

BIOGRAPHY



Dr. Bruno Marques

is a landscape architect and educator. After completing his studies in Lisbon (Portugal), Berlin (Germany) and Otago (New Zealand), Dr. Marques has practised in Germany, Estonia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, having an extensive portfolio of projects. At Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand, he has spent the past eleven years shaping a research agenda on landscape rehabilitation, cultural heritage, and Indigenous wellbeing. He is currently the Associate Dean for the Faculty of Architecture and Design Innovation and the President of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA).

Photo:
Gerry Keating

BIODIVERSITY | INSECT EXTINCTION.

Worldwide, 40 percent of all insects are in danger of extinction. Numerous independent studies between 1920 and 2018 have shown: This is primarily caused by human occupation of space.

INTENSIVE AGRICULTURE WITH PESTICIDES AND FERTILIZERS

46.6%

BIOLOGICAL FACTORS, FOREIGN SPECIES AND PATHOGENS

16.4%

URBANISATION

10.7%

DEFORESTATION

8.8%

CHANGES IN RIVERS AND WETLANDS

6.3%

OTHER

6.3%

CLIMATE CHANGE

5%

02

THINKING OF THE CITY
AS A WHOLE.WHY OPEN SPACES AND
ARCHITECTURE NEED
TO BE PLANNED TOGETHER.

Cities and open spaces are not opposites – together, they form an inseparable whole.

With his international experience, Niklas Kramer from ISA Stadtbauatelier pursues a design approach that conceives of buildings and open spaces as equal elements of sustainable urban development. In his article, he demonstrates why open space planning is essential for an authentic green revolution, not just an extra feature – in Europe as well as in Asia.

The ISA Internationales Stadtbauatelier office views cities as a complex network – a living organism whose functional, social and ecological vitality arises not just by adding together individual components, but through their dynamic interplay. This understanding is the foundation of ISA's design approach: The focus is always on a holistic view of people and their environment.



Design impulses for the historic canal in the city of Linping, China: Existing open space structures are used and enhanced as elements of a sustainable urban landscape.

Photo:
ISA Internationales Stadtbauatelier

Cities are more than an collection of individual functional components. They are living spaces that have to fulfil both material and immaterial needs – places that create identities, provide aesthetic qualities and enable emotional as well as social experiences. Buildings and open spaces are elements of a common fabric, since the quality of public spaces is just as important for the well-being of residents as the architecture itself. Without comprehensive upgrading and integration of open spaces, a green revolution would be incomplete. For this reason, open space planning is the foundation of the green revolution, not only a second thought. Climate protection, climate adaptation, biodiversity, social inclusion and urban resilience should not be seen as burdens: instead, they are driving forces for sustainably oriented urban development. This creates the opportunity for an actively designed urban landscape based on collective responsibility.

Without comprehensive upgrading and integration of open spaces, a green revolution would be incomplete. For this reason, open space planning is the foundation of the green revolution, not only a second thought.

Quote: Niklas Kramer

OBSTACLES IN PLANNING PRACTICE

The ISA office's many years of experience in national and international projects has demonstrated that cities around the world are facing similar challenges when it comes to a holistic approach to architecture and open spaces. One of the central problems here is the question of design practice. In many cities – whether in Germany, Europe or Asia – urban planning, traffic planning, environmental authorities and business development agencies are often working separately instead of collaborating. This sector-based approach makes it difficult to achieve an integrated perspective of strategies for architecture and open space. Furthermore, immediate economic interests frequently outweigh the long-term effects of ecological investments in open space infrastructure. In many places, political management instruments currently lack an adequate orientation that can constructively resolve this conflict of objectives.

In addition, there are often no legal framework conditions or binding minimum standards for urban open spaces. While there are clear legal principles and key figures for residential and commercial spaces, the requirements for publicly accessible, multifunctional open spaces are often limited to non-binding objectives or recommendations. Accordingly, there is no effective instrument for giving equal consideration to open space structures during the planning process and safeguarding them on the long term. What's more, the economic pressure is enormous: Increasing land prices make undeveloped plots into coveted investment properties. Open spaces are often not viewed as an economically viable use, but rather as "wasted potential". As a result, crucial recreational areas, green spaces, climate protection zones and fresh air corridors come under increasing pressure to develop. Consequently, investor interests determine the development of central urban areas, while open space planning oriented towards the common good fails due to financial and political hurdles.

AN EXPANDED UNDERSTANDING OF THE CITY

These challenges make it clear that modern urban development requires new ways of thinking and acting. A new understanding of the city is needed, in which city and landscape grow together to form a new whole. It is no longer enough to simply preserve the city and landscape. Instead, these must be cultivated, further developed and unite them into a productive urban landscape where sustainability goes beyond the level of façades.

Although the construction and open space planning are gaining importance internationally and many locations are facing similar challenges, the way they are handled varies considerably depending on the region. Cultural traditions, political systems, climate conditions and social priorities play a key role in shaping local solutions.

IN COMPARISON: AWARENESS OF PUBLIC SPACES IN EUROPE AND ASIA

In Germany and many parts of Europe, a broad awareness has developed in recent years regarding the importance of public spaces – not least due to a variety of opportunities that involve the public in planning processes. Nowadays, public spaces are increasingly recognised as a social, ecological and climate resource. More and more, open spaces are viewed as an important component of the social infrastructure – they act as a meeting place, promote biodiversity and help to diminish the consequences of climate change. In many Asian countries, on the other hand, this awareness has mainly been felt within professional circles, while it is only gradually starting to grow among the wider public. Nevertheless, a dynamic development is evident: Public spaces are gaining in strategic importance, particularly in the context of urbanisation and the improvement of urban quality of life. In many cases, central management of urban development processes makes it possible to implement large-scale open space projects within a faster timeframe. For example, China has seen an increasing trend away from the concept of engineered megacities towards the idea of urban ecosystems.

THE EXAMPLE OF LINPING – INTEGRATING OPEN SPACES INTO THE URBAN ORGANISM

Design impulses such as the competition entry “Digital and smart city” created by the ISA office for the city of Linping in China exemplify this type of integrated strategy. The goal is to understand public spaces not just as a representative backdrop, but as a functional element of resilient urban structures that are viable for everyday use (see Fig. 1). One approach is to preserve and enhance existing open space structures that were previously underutilised, such as the historical canals in Linping, and to integrate them into the city (see Fig. 2 and 3). This increases the quality of urban structures while also raising awareness about the hidden potential of such open spaces and their significance for sustainable urban development.



Prospects for the Linping South Station hub: Here, building structures and open spaces can be linked together.

Photo:
Urban planning competition
“Digital and smart city of
Liping”, ISA Internationales
Stadtbaustudio

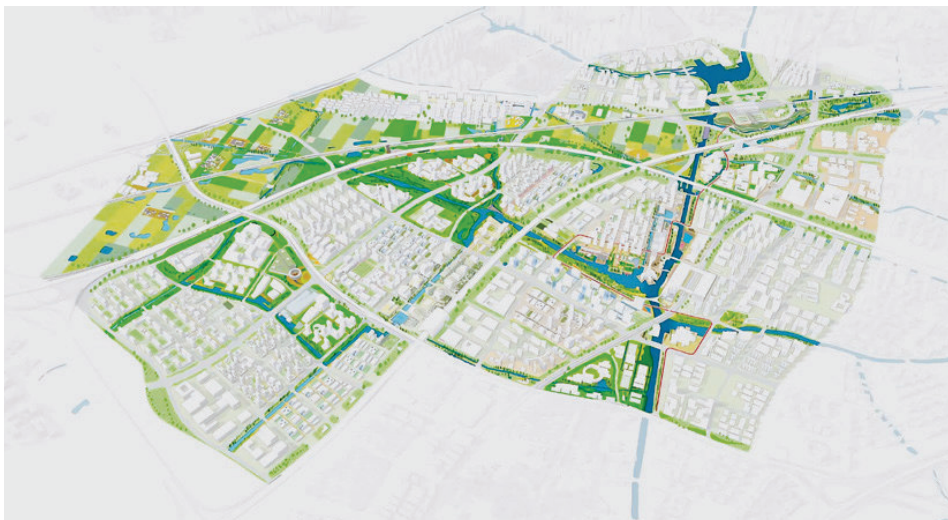
THE GLOBAL PLANNING DIALOGUE: RENEGOTIATING THE CITY AS A WHOLE

Our task as designers and urban planners is to actively shape this international dialogue. What matters here is connecting local identities with global sustainability goals and truly understanding the differences between planning cultures. Through open intercultural dialogue, we can create acceptance and identification – the foundation for a sustainable design of our living spaces.

In the planning process, we have to learn to think more integrally. This means that building construction and landscape architecture are no longer considered separately, but rather on the scale of the urban climate, micro-ecosystem and social mixing. The global building and open space revolution will begin not just when we design buildings to be more sustainable, but when we renegotiating the city as a whole. With climate-positive solutions, the concept of the environment can be rethought so that the cities emerge that are both sustainable and livable.

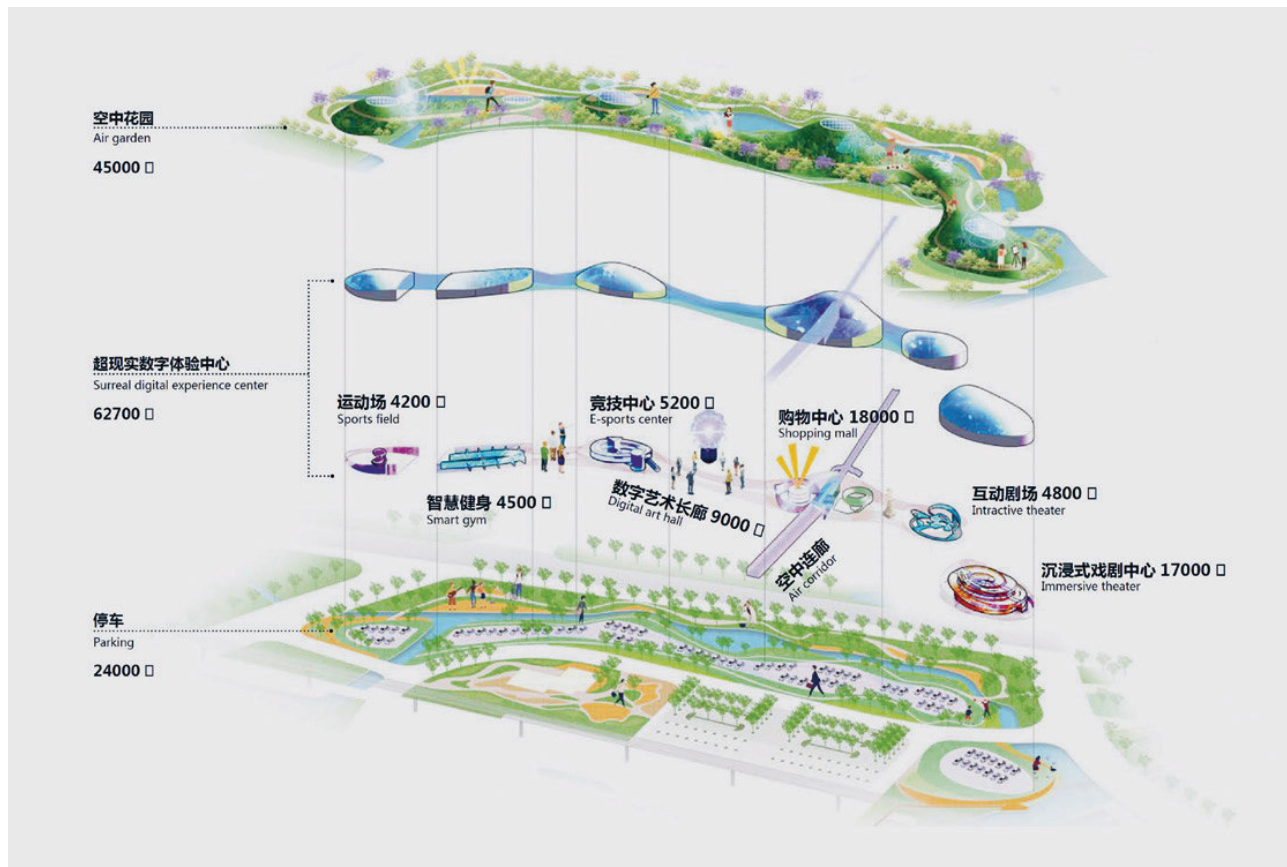
In the planning process, we have to learn to think more integrally. This means that building construction and landscape architecture are no longer considered separately, but rather on the scale of the urban climate, micro-ecosystem and social mixing.

Quote: Niklas Kramer



Urban development concept
“Digital and smart city of Lin-
ping” involving integration of the
entire existing canal network
into the open space.

Graphic:
Urban planning competition
“Digital and smart city of
Linping”, ISA Internationales
Stadtbaustudio



Functional layout of "Linping Landscape Campus": The campus is characterised by the interplay between diversity of use, quality of open spaces and integration into urban design.

Graphic:
Urban planning competition
"Digital and smart city of Linping",
ISA Internationales Stadtbauatelier

BIOGRAPHY



Niklas Kramer,

Master of Engineering, studied Urban Planning at the Stuttgart Technical University and works as a lecturer there since 2023. Also since 2023, he is a partner at the ISA Internationales Stadtbauatelier office with its headquarters in Stuttgart and partner offices in Beijing and Guangzhou. He works on international urban planning projects, for example the development of new neighbourhoods in Seoul and Shenzhen, as well as open space planning tasks for German municipalities.

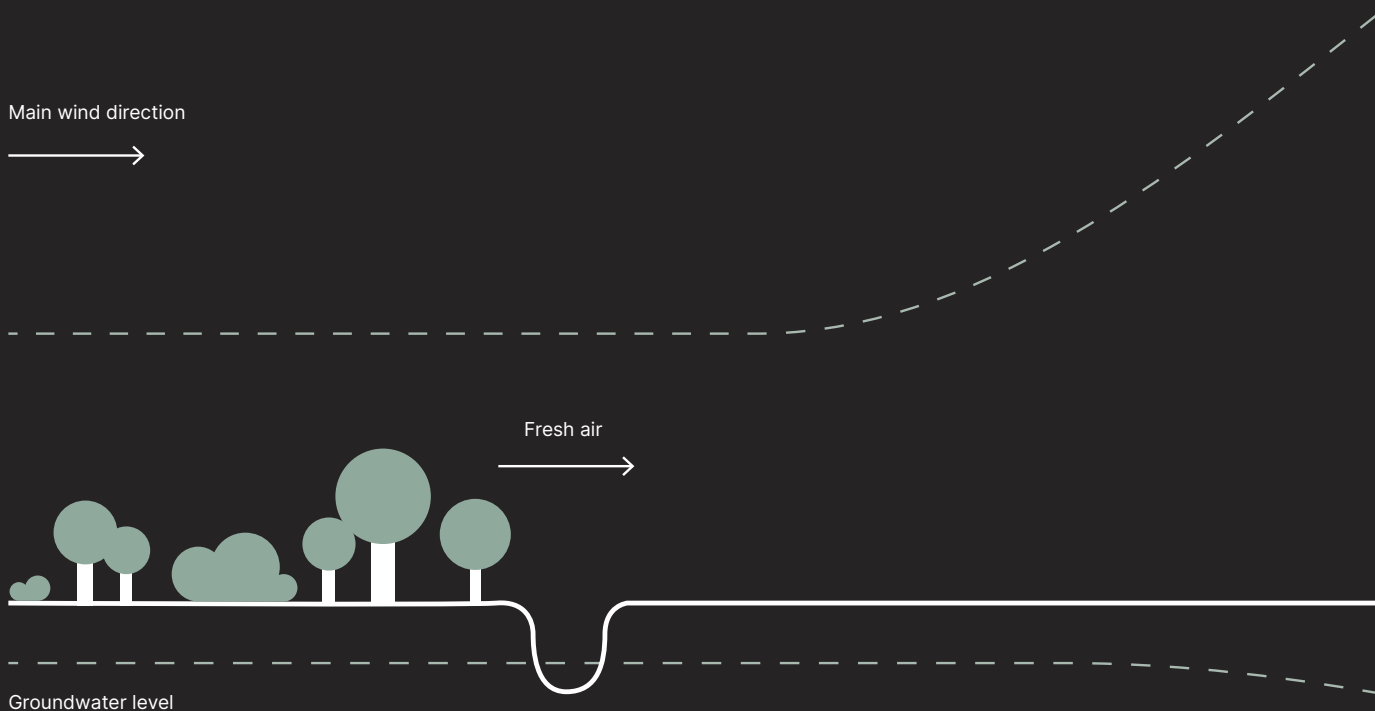
Photo:
ISA Internationales Stadtbauatelier

URBAN CLIMATE & RURAL CLIMATE.

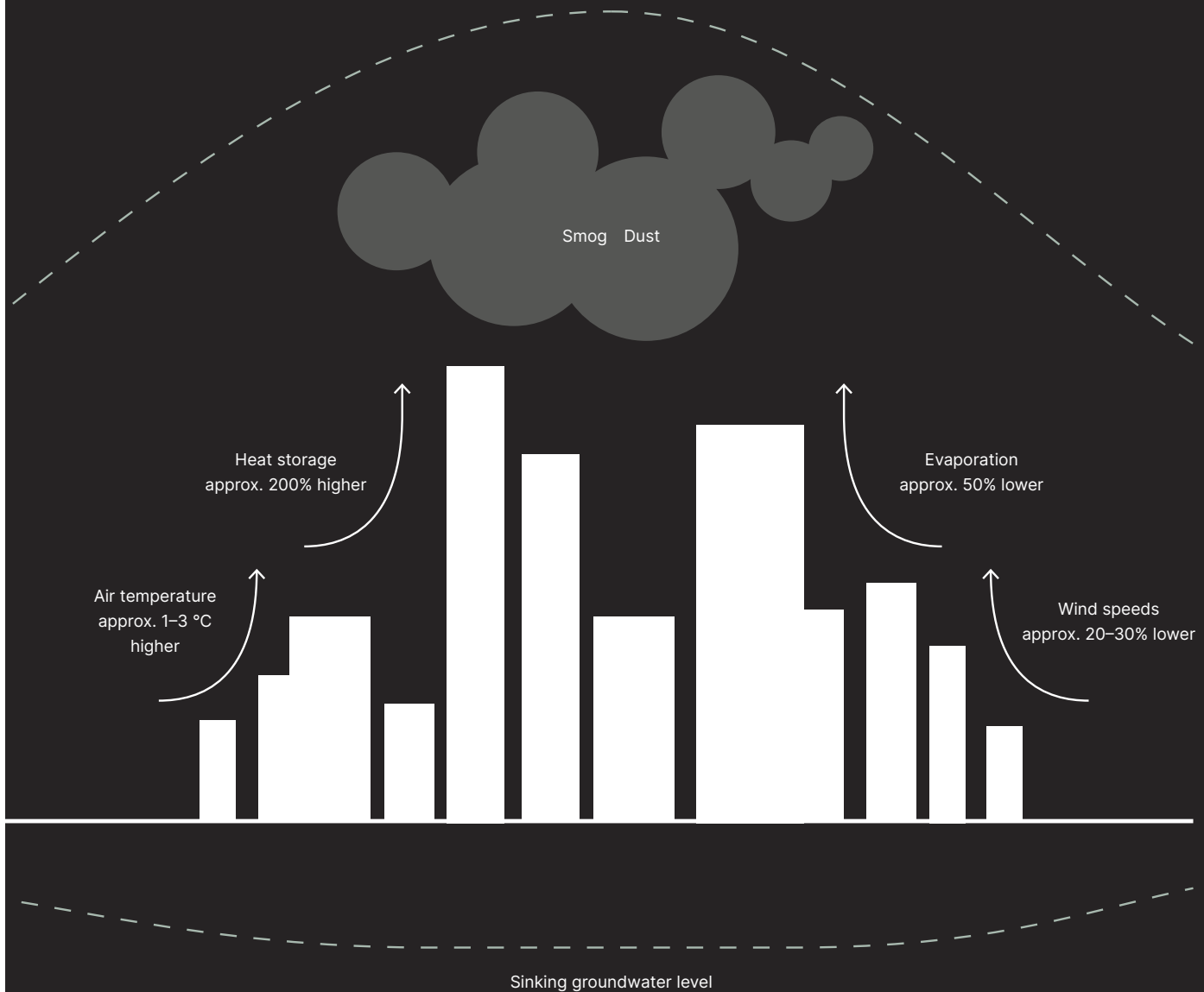
The heat island effect has a negative impact on urban climate. This is favoured by dense development, sealed surfaces and traffic-related emissions.

Rural climate

Main wind direction



Urban climate



03

“OPEN SPACE IS NEVER NEUTRAL – IT EITHER HEALS OR DIVIDES”

An interview with Carlo Ratti,
architect, urbanist, and curator of the
Venice Architecture Biennale 2025

As curator of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2025 and director of the MIT Senseable City Lab, Carlo Ratti explores how open space can become a catalyst for urban transformation. From adaptive streetscapes to mobile public squares, he rethinks architecture as a collaborative, ecological practice. For Ratti, the future of cities depends on how we design the spaces between buildings – not as leftovers, but as essential, evolving infrastructure.



AquaPraça is designed as adaptive infrastructure for rising sea levels, the mobile plaza will travel from the Venice Architecture Biennale to COP30 in Belém, creating space for dialogue on climate, water, and the future of public areas.

Photo:

CRA-Carlo Ratti Associati +
Höweler + Yoon Architecture

QUESTION

What role has open space played in your work as an architect, researcher, and planner?

ANSWER

Open space has always fascinated me – it is where architecture becomes porous. From *the Copenhagen Wheel* to *Unparking*, much of our work explores how mobility and data reshape public space. We have tried to treat streets and plazas as dynamic systems – sensitive to both people and the environment.

QUESTION

Was there a project or moment that fundamentally changed your view of open space?

ANSWER

Too many to think of – like working on *HubCab*, a project mapping taxi trips in New York City. It revealed the enormous amount of unused road capacity. Open space isn't only physical – it's temporal at times, and even informal. You can redesign a street just by reprogramming its use.

QUESTION

Which countries or cities have taken a leading role in rethinking open space planning globally? What are the key factors for their success?

ANSWER

I would highlight Medellín, Colombia, where urban acupuncture turned disused slopes into connected public parks. Or Seoul with the Cheonggyecheon stream. Their success lies in three key factors: political will, in-depth local knowledge, and a willingness to co-design with citizens, not just for them.

QUESTION

What are, in your opinion, the biggest challenges for an open space transition – both globally and locally?

ANSWER

We need to shift from thinking of open space as leftover land to understanding it as core urban infrastructure. That shift requires a quieter change: a shift in authorship. Despite its inherently collaborative nature, architecture still clings to the myth of Prometheus. Biennales love to celebrate "visionaries," even as they showcase interdisciplinary work. We proposed a different model, inspired by academic research: co-authorship. All are credited as equals, with a description of their contribution. If adaptation is a collective response to global necessity, then its authorship must be locally collective by design.



The Copenhagen Wheel transforms any bicycle into a smart hybrid e-bike, capturing and redistributing energy while collecting urban data. A symbol of how mobility, technology, and open space can interact to reshape the city from the street up.

Photo:
Max Tomasinelli



Canal Café uses purified lagoon water to brew coffee, turning water quality into a shared urban experience. The installation transforms infrastructure into a visible, sensual commons.

Photo: Marco Zorzanello
Courtesy: La Biennale di Venezia

QUESTION

Your curatorial concept for the Biennale aims to rethink architecture. Does this also apply to open space planning?

ANSWER

Absolutely. In fact, open space is where the boundaries between natural, artificial, and collective intelligences are most vividly negotiated. Streets, squares, waterfronts – they are where architecture becomes an ecological interface. So yes, rethinking architecture today *must* include rethinking open space as an adaptive space.

Take *AquaPraça*, a floating public square that travels from Venice to COP30 in Belém – it's an open space designed to host encounters, serving as mobile infrastructure that adjusts to fluctuating sea levels. Or consider *Canal Café*, which turns water into a commons, coffee made with purified lagoon water. The idea is to bring complex environmental issues – such as water quality or rising sea levels – into the simplest acts of our everyday lives. That means, I believe we're only beginning to explore the full potential. There's more room to grow.



Post Office Pods reimagine outdoor workspaces as places for net-working, creativity, and community. Developed for rural post office sites in Italy, the prototype turns underused land into shared civic infrastructure.

Photo:
Antonio Guiotto

QUESTION

What role did open space planning play in this year's Biennale concept – and was it sufficiently represented in your view?

ANSWER

It played a fundamental role. Many of the projects explore how public and open spaces can absorb climate shocks, foster civic inclusion, or mediate between species. The Giardini are traditionally seen as a backdrop, but they are also a historical artefact of open space design. This year, we encouraged projects to spill out – to blur the lines between inside and out. Future Biennales could do more to activate the gardens and unused spaces, not just as a temporary set-up, but as a prototype for activation. *Post Office Pods* asked the question: How to work in a garden? Reimagining the office as a space where human connection and innovation thrive even in an era dominated by digital tools. This outdoor co-working space installation is a prototype for the "office pods" that will be situated within the renovated external areas of rural Poste Italiane post offices or vacant spaces converted into co-working spaces.

QUESTION

Was there a submission in the context of open space that particularly impressed or inspired you, and why?

ANSWER

Open Regeneration of Housing Estates, which pioneers an open modular system to transform housing estates across Barcelona, was very interesting. Utilising innovative wooden exoskeletons that snap onto existing buildings, these enable sustainable upgrades to homes and shared spaces. The design integrates adaptable “kits” for repair, expansion, or functional enhancements – future-proofing neighbourhoods through flexible, user-driven improvements.

QUESTION

The Biennale presents scenarios between dystopian isolation and adaptation to planetary realities. What can open space planning learn from this?

ANSWER

It reminds us that open space is never neutral – it either heals or divides. In climate adaptation, open spaces are our first line of reference: floodable parks, cooling corridors using trees, and refuge during crises. The challenge is designing these places not to be fixed, but open to evolving and adapting, even in their resilience.



We need to shift from thinking of open space as leftover land to understanding it as core urban infrastructure.

Quote: Carlo Ratti



QUESTION

The opposition between ‘Natural’ and ‘Artificial’ runs through your exhibition. How can this tension be addressed in the design of open spaces?

ANSWER

I don’t see it as opposition, but dialogue. Projects like *Talking to Elephants* show how open space can welcome non-human intelligences. Design must let nature and technology inform one another – so our parks are sensor-equipped and canopies shade our data infrastructures. Technology is essential – but only if used wisely. Sensors can tell us how people move, but not how they *feel*. We need hybrid approaches: real-time data for responsiveness, and storytelling for empathy. The goal isn’t a “smart” space – it’s an *intelligent* one: aware, adaptive, and inclusive.

QUESTION

How can we design public spaces to become collective spaces again – in times of polarization and cleavage?

ANSWER

We need to create conditions for *encounter* – not just occupancy. Spaces like *Speakers’ Corner* at the Biennale di Venezia, which host our ongoing GENS public programme, encourage debate without control. Architecture cannot force dialogue, but it can suggest it: by creating spaces that are legible, accessible, and open-ended. Small things – benches that face each other, thresholds that invite – can have a large impact.

QUESTION

Would it be reasonable to require all future Biennale submissions to address the open space context?

ANSWER

Open space is too important to be a second thought. If we want architecture to meet the challenges of our century – climate, equity, livability – then the question of open spaces as adaptable spaces has to be a central point.



Speakers' Corner at the Venice Architecture Biennale offers a space for spontaneous dialogue and public exchange, part of the GENS programme that reimagines architecture as a platform for collective encounter.

Photo: Andrea Avezzù
Courtesy: La Biennale di Venezia

BIOGRAPHY



Carlo Ratti

is a Professor of the Practice of Urban Technologies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston, where he directs the Senseable City Lab, and is a Full Professor in the Department of Architecture, Built Environment, and Construction Engineering at the Politecnico di Milano. He is a founding partner of the international architecture and innovation office CRA-Carlo Ratti Associati and has established several tech start-ups in the United States and Europe. Ratti studied in Turin, Paris, and Cambridge, completing his PhD as a Fulbright Scholar at MIT. In December 2023, he was named as the Curator of the Venice Biennale Architettura 2025.

Photo:
World Economic Forum | Mattias Nutt

URBAN SPACES | A DRIVING FACTOR BEHIND LAND USAGE.

Data collected in Europe and the UK between 2000 and 2018 show the principal reasons for the conversion of green and agricultural areas into sealed construction land.

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY 25.1%

LIVING IN NON-DENSE URBAN AREAS 21.7%

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR 19.1%

MINES, LANDFILLS 16.7%

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE 10.6%

OTHER 6.5%

LIVING IN DENSE URBAN AREAS 0.3%

[REDACTED]

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04

LEARNING FROM WATER.

HOW SINGAPORE HARNESSSES
NATURAL PROCESSES
FOR URBAN PLANNING.How can the synchronisation of city
and nature succeed?

Gerhard Hauber gives an impressive account of Singapore's transformation into a water-conscious city. Using a specific project, he demonstrates how technological, ecological and social aspects merge together to form a new urban narrative – and how open spaces can become places of collective resilience.

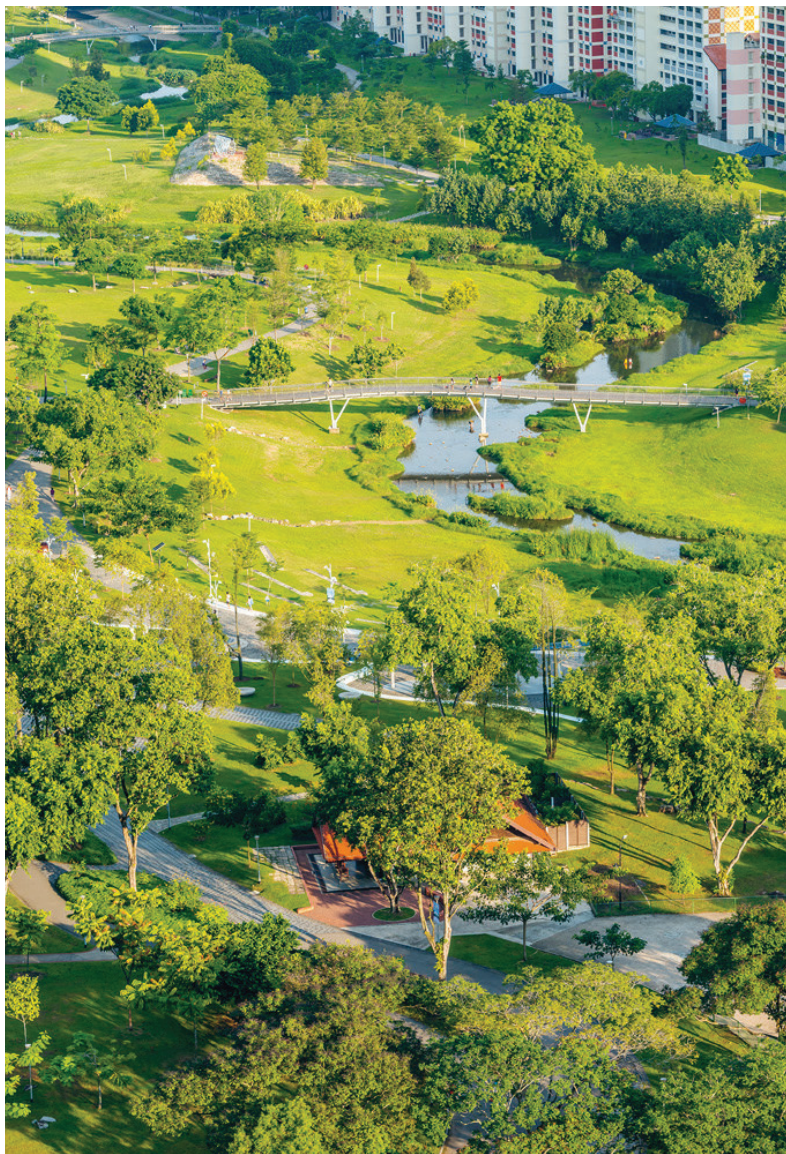
AN IMAGE AS A SOURCE
OF INSPIRATION

In 2005, when I found myself standing in front of the evaluation-committee of the Public Utilities Board in the sweltering shade of a hawker centre after a twelve-hour flight and a quick breakfast, I was slightly dazed with fatigue and by the strangeness of Singapore. Adrenaline-driven, I gave a presentation with Singaporean partners for the office Henning Larsen to share our experiences and ideas regarding different ways to handle water in the urban metropolis. The last picture of the presentation showed a man sitting on the edge of an urban body of water that we had planned in Berlin's Potsdamer Platz, cooling his feet in the water.

This image immediately triggered reactions among the committee: Whispers, smiles, approving gestures. It aligned perfectly with the vision of director Khoo Teng Chye, who had pictured the future of Singapore just like that: Water so clean that you can come into contact without hesitation. It was the right impulse at the right time in the right place, a moment of synchronism, as C.G. Jung describes: When an inner experience such as a vision coincides with an external event in a meaningful way.

Subsequently, we developed a master plan for the “Central Watershed” – a completely alternative approach to the way rainwater was previously handled in Singapore. Instead of exclusively directing it into the sea through 8,000 km of concrete canals, the plan was to manage the water where it meets the ground. Letting water infiltrate, evaporate, storing and using it in a decentralised manner – and only redirecting it when necessary – this was the new guiding principle. The goal was not to create a new infrastructure but to develop an integrated concept based on the principles of blue-green infrastructure.

This interdisciplinary approach combines water management with the enhancement of public spaces for recreation and urban nature. The result was known as the ABC programme: Active – Beautiful – Clean. The aim was to make rainwater become a natural part of every property, park and every road.



From a bird's eye view: Bishan Park as a green infrastructure, including restoring the river's natural course, integrated retention areas and improved atmosphere for recreation.

BISHAN PARK: PILOT PROJECT FOR A NEW URBANITY

In 2008, the project was still in its early stage of development – there was no other project that demonstrated this new way of handling rainwater on a larger scale. Then the opportunity came up to redesign the 60 ha Bishan Park in Singapore and transform our vision into a constructed reality. This park, created in 1960, is a green oasis in the midst of dense building developments – comparable with Central Park in New York. Renovation was long overdue. A 2.7 kilometre concrete canal running along the southwestern bank offered the possibilities of integrating water as a dynamic design element. The aim was to bring together flood protection, biodiversity, decentralised rainwater management, nature experiences and recreation.

A complex planning process began. Many elements were new, construction methods had to be reviewed approved, responsibilities and budgets had to be negotiated between authorities and a whole new fluid hydraulic system had to be modelled. Together with experts from Germany, we built a 100 m long section to test alternatives to krainer walls or willow cuttings that would be suitable for tropical environments. After all, the natural bank had to withstand heavy rain and offer living space for flora and fauna.

Making the river part of daily life: Children and adults cross the renatured waterway on stepping stones.

Photo:
Henning Larsen GmbH





Technical waterway before redesign – sealed canal in Bishan Park before reconstruction.

Photo:
Henning Larsen GmbH

RETURN OF THE WILDERNESS

The park itself was designed as a flood area. Under heavy rain it absorbs water, reduces the flow velocity and hydraulic force (hydraulic overload), thereby protecting lower areas of the city. At the same time, it promotes the evaporation and infiltration of built-up rainwater, contributing to local water management in touch with nature.

Since then, the park is telling a new story to the city's inhabitants: It has brought dynamic natural processes back to the city. In the first year alone, biodiversity increased by 30 percent. Otters playing in the river are now a popular feature on social networks – a visible expression of the wildness that has been regained.

The park landscape now offers lots of space for leisure and movement and is used intensively around the clock: Tai chi at sunrise, playing football, picnics on one of the many lawn areas, jogging in the evening. Particularly remarkable for Singapore: Direct access to the water is now permitted. Many people experience the feeling of getting their feet in the river for the first time here – and watch the guppies that were long since disappeared.

TRANSFORMATION BEGINS WITHIN

External transformation requires an internal counterpart. Over millennia, we have become increasingly estranged from nature, seeing it as something external – as an object for us to control. This made the massive modification of our Earth possible, but one of the results has been the climate crisis. However, gradually growing awareness that returning to nature in our cities and settlements is part of the solution.

The integrative power of soil, water and plants are crucial for achieving an acceptable climate future. The soil saves and purifies water, plants cool through evaporation and provide living space for biodiversity. The goal is to allow natural processes to flourish in order to create resilience that can withstand extremes. In this regard, water is a unique teacher: Always in movement, changing and yet constant. From a scientific perspective, the majority of our water comes from meteorites – which means it is older than the Earth. Maybe the water inside us was once in outer space. So why not live in harmony with rain and the weather – give nature space and time, even in our cities?



Relaxation, movement and aesthetic quality:
Bishan Park offers space for individual uses.

Photo:
Henning Larsen GmbH



The river as a new living space: The return of otters, fish and native vegetation is a visible sign for the revitalisation of the ecosystem.

Photo:
PUB, Singapore

The integrative power of soil, water and plants is crucial for achieving an acceptable climate future. (...)

It is about allowing natural processes to flourish in order to grow resilience that can withstand extremes.

Quote: Gerhard Hauber

Dynamic processes, cycles and complex interdependencies make water stable – precisely because it is constantly changing. At the same time, this is a prerequisite for handling extremes. Water is the most impressive teacher: moving, uniting, powerful and yet constant – older than the Earth itself, as scientific findings have suggested. The fear of losing control must give way to a vision of natural aliveness. Having biodiversity and wilderness in our direct environment means that we are not just concerned with ourselves, but also with a larger community, greater than the human world, that ensures our survival.



The new Bishan Park combines local recreation, biodiversity and rain water management in a multifunctional open space.

Photo:
Henning Larsen GmbH

A NEW STORY BEGINS

The American philosopher Charles Eisenstein says: "Symptoms are based on systems, systems are based on stories." A new kind of storytelling is needed – one that encourages connection with nature and values flourishing over mere growth. The "Bioregions" movement shows one possible path: This movement is based on circular systems, local growth cycles, alternative economic models and thinking in terms of natural borders rather than political borders. What natural resources does a region have to offer? How much of those resources can we use without exhausting them? How can we transform cities into living laboratories where food, constructional materials and medicines are produced in a circular economy – without exceeding limits?

In my opinion the combination between re-integration of water and the increasing urgency for additional biodiversity, particularly in urban areas, has the power to open up new paths.

Quote: Gerhard Hauber

I am still waiting for this synchronicity between inner vision and external change. We have a picture of how our cities and landscapes could look with this kind of vision in our minds and hearts. But the physical counterpart has yet to be created. For me, reintegrating (rain)water is the first step. Modified planning processes are needed, new construction methods, standards, and ways of thinking. Open space planning for me means creating entirely different visions of city and landscape. An integrated, occasionally chaotic and dynamically changing balance between time and space for water and nature, and the requirements of modern life.

In the minds of design planners as well, a traditional image of controlled, over-designed open spaces often prevents further progress. In my opinion the combination between re-integration of water and the increasing urgency for additional biodiversity, particularly in urban areas, has the power to open up new paths. Let's explore these paths – with patience, endurance and the never-failing agility that nature demonstrates so wonderfully.

BIOGRAPHY



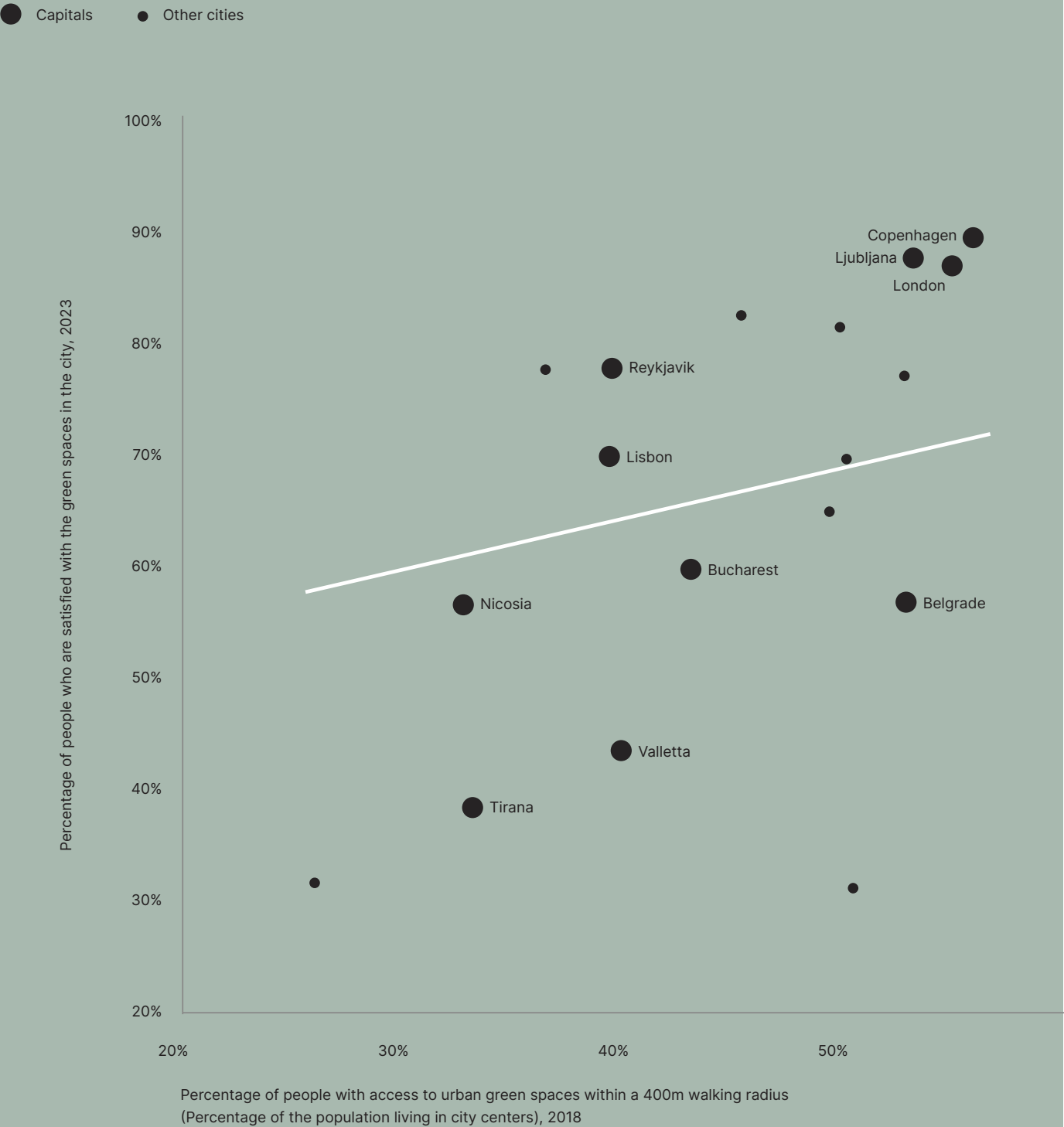
Gerhard Hauber

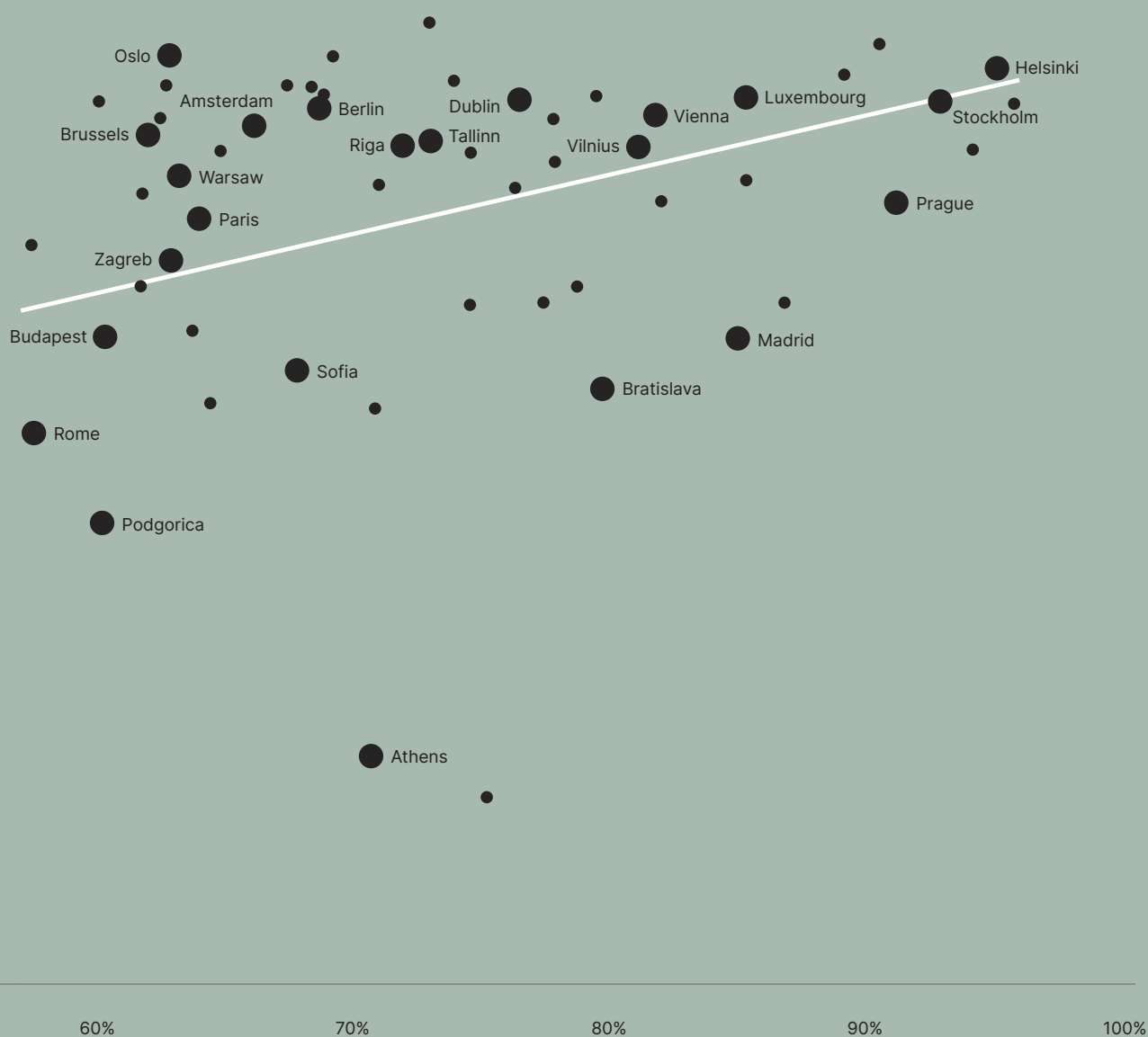
is a landscape architect and partner at the international architecture office Henning Larsen. Since 1996 he has played a key role in shaping the development of the office with its headquarters in Copenhagen and was involved in the establishment of locations in Singapore, Beijing and Portland. He managed projects in Germany and internationally with a particular focus on integrating water into urban spaces. Hauber is a member of the Biodiversity Advisory Board of the DGNB, teaches at multiple universities and is committed to climate-resilient urban development.

Photo:
Henning Larsen GmbH

URBAN GREEN SPACES | SATISFACTION.

Access to urban green spaces is not the only factor in the population’s satisfaction levels, but it is an important one. This was shown by an evaluation of 70,000 interviews in 83 European cities.





05

INCLUSIVE URBAN SPACES.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF
FEMINIST URBAN PLANNING.Whose perspectives shape
our cities – and who is left out?

Feminist urban geographer Leslie Kern highlights the deep-seated inequalities embedded in urban planning. Her article presents ten principles of feminist urbanism – for more just, safe, and caring public spaces.

Feminist urban planning is a set of values, practices, and principles that aim to address the long-standing exclusion of women and other marginalized groups from planning processes and urban infrastructure. In recent decades, many cities have begun to formally incorporate feminist planning into their policies; Glasgow and Nantes are two notable examples. However, there is still a long way to go before cities become truly justified and comprehensive.

THE LIMITS OF THE MODERN CITY

Despite the promise of greater independence, professional opportunities, and freedom, there have been barriers to women's efforts to become full and equal participants in the social, economic, and political life of cities. By almost every measure, women have been systematically disadvantaged by urban planning and politics, compounded by gender norms that circumscribe women's activities in the public sphere. From the fear of male violence to the lack of infrastructure to share the burden of care work, women have been faced with challenges that impact their everyday lives as well as their long-term well-being.

A LEGACY OF FEMINIST RESISTANCE

Women have never been passive in the face of these challenges, however. Architect and urban scholar Dolores Hayden uncovered proto-feminist plans from as early as the 19th century to transform homes, neighbourhoods, and cities in ways that would free women from domestic burdens and create collective spaces for care work.¹ Hayden herself advocated for a vision of the "non-sexist city" in the 1980s, as did the UK's Matrix Collective with their 1984 book *Making Space: Women and the Man Made Environment*. From this work and decades of further research, feminist planning emerged as a strong force dedicated to making cities more justified, sustainable, and caring.

¹Hayden, Dolores: *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1982.

From domestic burden to collective care:
rethinking everyday urban infrastructures.

Photo:
Phil Hearing/Unsplash



TEN PRINCIPLES FOR FEMINIST URBAN PLANNING

In my own work as a feminist urban geographer who wrote the book *Feminist City*, I have come to believe in ten principles of feminist urban planning. These are based on feminist values of teamwork, care, justice, intersectionality, respect for difference, and relationality.

Public space should reflect the needs of diverse communities – not just traditional norms.

Photo:
Rollz International/Unsplash





Designing cities with women and marginalized groups in mind benefits everyone.

Photo:
William Olivier/Unsplash

01 DIVERSE LEADERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Women and others from excluded groups must be “at the table” for decision making. After all, you cannot solve problems that you do not even know exist. Cities that have had women mayors and elected officials, such as Paris, Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes have been at the forefront of urban planning initiatives that aim to end sexism in the city. Glasgow councillor Holly Bruce successfully proposed a feminist town planning policy, and deputy mayor Mahaut Behru is leading efforts for Nantes to become the first non-sexist city in France.

02 WOMEN ARE EXPERTS ON THEIR OWN LIVES

Historically, the voices of women and others with less power have not been listened to in urban planning. Any planning project must include time for deeply engaged participation from community members. This entails using creative, feminist methods for reaching people who are often overlooked in planning processes, including newcomers, disabled people, older people, and young people. In 2022, Vienna surveyed 15,000 women and learned that time, space, and opportunity were of critical importance. Los Angeles’ public transportation system (LA Metro) commissioned large research reports to understand the mobility challenges faced by girls and women, which led to the development of a Gender Action Plan.

03 EVERYONE CAN BE A PLANNER

Women and girls often feel unwelcome in urban public spaces, partly because they have rarely given concrete input into the design process. While planners and architects have the necessary technical expertise, community members can offer valuable guidance from conception to construction. The UK organization Make Space for Girls involves girls, who are often overlooked as public space users, in park design to create spaces that are safe, fun, and active. Successful projects include Brickfields Park in Bath, England, where girls had input into the design of spaces for social activity.

04 FEMINIST PLANNING IS INTERSECTIONAL

Feminism recognizes that women are diverse and that intersecting identities such as race, class, sexuality, age, religion, ability, and more impact how women live, move, and feel in cities. Thus, feminist urban planning must listen to the voices of women from all backgrounds before deciding that a project meets women’s needs. Black women urban scholars have argued, for example, that increased policing and surveillance in cities is harmful to Black women and their communities, and should not be promoted as a feminist safety intervention.²

² Richie, Beth E., *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*, New York: New York University Press, 2012.



Feminist urbanism calls for spaces of care, teamwork, and relational justice.

Photo:
Andy Vult/Unsplash

05 SEXISM CANNOT BE DESIGNED OUT

The meaning and experience of a place, such as a public plaza or park, depends as much on how it is used and by whom as it does on its physical form. Therefore planning processes need to include an understanding of the social and cultural environment. Typically, women find public spaces more useable and safe when there are different groups of people present, as well as mixed uses. Inclusive zoning is one tool cities can use to avoid a problematic separation of land uses and ensure that a variety of activities can occur throughout the day and evening in urban public spaces.

06 SAFETY IS ABOUT MORE THAN LIGHTING

Fear and danger often limit women's use of urban spaces. Feminist urban planning asks for a more nuanced, intersectional, and contextual approach than simply adding lighting or CCTV cameras. Planners can involve women in safety planning through methods such as Safety Audits, developed in cities such as Toronto in the 1980s, in which community members walk in groups through areas that do not feel safe and offer a range of ideas for improvement, including landscape design, mixed uses, traffic calming measures, and more. Dublin has experimented with a central "safe zone" near the city's nightlife. Between 20:00 and 03:00, a person can go to this zone for support and receive assistance to get home.

07 BODIES MATTER

The modernist and car-focused planning that came to dominate many urban environments in the 20th century was not human-centered, as the critic Jane Jacobs argued in her 1961 classic *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. During the pandemic, as we were instructed to socialize outside, many people found that their cities had few places to sit, gather, to find shade or water, or to use the bathroom. A feminist approach insists that cities are for people, and that people have bodies with a range of needs. If planning starts from the body and our universal needs as living organisms, we can create more welcoming, vibrant, safe, and inclusive spaces.

08 MOVE THE MARGIN TO THE CENTRE

Feminist urban planning argues that women's needs are not exceptional. In fact, if we take women as well as other often-excluded groups, we are the majority of the population. Mainstream planning processes that see women and others as "special interest groups" whose needs "take away" from the majority are misguided and wrong. Furthermore, if we plan from the perspective of those who have been most excluded, we are more likely to create spaces that are accessible and inclusive for all. In her book *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, Sasha Costanza-Chock argues that design can be led by marginalized communities and can explicitly challenge, rather than reproduce, structural inequalities.

09 CENTRE CARE WORK

Women's everyday lives in the city are largely shaped by a mix of paid work and unpaid caregiving responsibilities. Women still perform an unfair share of care work and our cities often make this work more challenging by separating cities into single use zones. This adds a large time and travel burden to women's already complicated days. In Bogotá, the district care system is a recent intervention that deliberately places sites of care – everything from child care and schools to health care to communal kitchens and laundries to education programs for adults – in a walkable or transit-accessible block. This form of planning is meant to take care work out of the home and to give women back more time that can be used for education, training, work, and leisure.



Mainstream planning processes that see women and others as "special interest groups" whose needs "take away" from the majority are misguided and wrong.



Quote: Leslie Kern

10 SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUITY ARE NOT IN COMPETITION

As cities seek more environmentally-friendly design, including active transport infrastructure, they must integrate equity goals with sustainability goals. Bike lanes, for example, may not feel safe or accessible to all depending on their design. Caregivers may find it difficult to use bikes and scooters while travelling with babies and children. In Amsterdam, a famously bike-friendly city, the Urban Cycling Institute is addressing barriers such as cost, physical accessibility, and a lack of participation of marginalized groups in decisions about cycling infrastructure in order to promote more equity in the city's commitment to sustainability.



Urban mobility and safety are key concerns in feminist city planning.

Photo:
Filip Mroz/Unsplash

In conclusion, feminist urban planning is oriented toward helping planners and policy makers serve more people, better. It recognizes past disadvantages, and works to undo histories of discrimination. Feminist design seeks to enhance the opportunities for women and other marginalized groups to experience independence, safety, economic success, pleasure, and justice in the city.

BIOGRAPHY



Leslie Kern,

PhD, is an urban geographer and the author of three books about cities, including *Gentrification Is Inevitable and Other Lies* and *Feminist City: Claiming Space in a Man Made World*. Until 2024, she was Associate Professor of Geography and Environment and Women's and Gender Studies at Mount Allison University in Sackville, Canada. Her research and writing focus on feminist urban theory, housing justice, and equitable city-making.

Photo:
Nicola Toon

CLIMATE CHANGE | HEALTH CONSEQUENCES.

People of different genders react differently to rising temperatures and extreme heat, as a survey of 1,002 Germans shows. These risks can be prevented through a change in open space planning.

● Women ● Men

FATIGUE



SLEEP DISORDERS



HEADACHES



DIZZINESS



NAUSEA



MUSCLE CRAMPS



OTHER



06

UNSEALING PLACES

HOW FORMER TRAFFIC
AREAS BECOME FUTURE-
ORIENTED GREEN OASES

Unsealing is more
than a technical process –
it is a cultural change.

Sabine Dessovic explains how asphalted traffic areas can be transformed into liveable urban squares. Two Austrian projects in Tulln and St. Pölten provide clear examples of how participation, biodiversity and climate adaptation can create a new urban identity.

As summers become hotter and drier and rain events are more irregular, planners are receiving increasingly clearer calls to action – in rural communities as well as urban centres. Paved squares and a lack of greenery have become noticeable problem areas. Getting rid of asphalt is the order of the day.

WHY UNSEAL SPACES?

Unsealing improves water management by allowing infiltration and long-term storage of rainwater, promotes biodiversity and improves soil health. Heat islands are cooled off and growing trees store CO₂. The surrounding environment also benefits from unsealed spaces: Green spaces invite people to linger, improve the quality of life in the entire neighbourhood and strengthen the urban fabric.

Unsealing, benefits the soil, water management and climate – and improves local quality of life.

With combined initiatives, car parks can be transformed into biodiverse parks, asphalt deserts into places to spend time.

Quote: Sabine Dessovic

NEW FREEDOM FOR THE GROUND

Unsealing means making the ground permeable to water. In the process, sealed surfaces that are impermeable to water and air are broken and replaced with materials that allow infiltration. Green spaces, gravel, water-resistant coverings or paved tiles with green spaces in between – these are permeable and promote sustainable rainwater management. There are a variety of materials to choose from, and the possibility of vehicle traffic is not ruled out. In the planning process, a distinction is made between fully permeable and semi-permeable surfaces.

Fully permeable surfaces are green areas on natural soil or gravel areas. Of course, water can seep through these surfaces. The water is absorbed by the soil and can evaporate or flow through the soil layers into the groundwater.

Surfaces that are open to infiltration are often found on heavily utilised areas. Here, pavements are laid for pedestrian and vehicle access that can still absorb rainwater thanks to their joint width and store it in underlying layers. If a *sponge city* is installed under these surfaces, the rainwater can seep into these storage bodies and remains available there for trees.

Unsealing, benefits the soil, water management and climate – and improves local quality of life. With combined initiatives, car parks can be transformed into biodiverse parks, asphalt deserts into places to spend time.



A view of the Tulln Town Hall and the newly designed, largely unsealed forecourt with intensive spring planting.



Photo:
Rhea Dessovic / DnD GmbH

THE EXAMPLE OF TULLN: TRANSFORMING A CAR PARK INTO A GREEN PARK

This was achieved on the Nibelungenplatz square in Tulln, Austria. This urban community with roughly 17,000 inhabitants is not far from the capital city of Vienna, and is well-known as a garden town due to the abundance of garden facilities. Here, a car park of roughly 8,000 m² in front of the Tulln Town Hall was redesigned into a green park and multi-purpose square. In this way, the town has reinforced its image as a garden town while also reacting to the needs of the public. Residents were involved in the design of Nibelungenplatz from the very start. In 2021, a public participation process was launched including public voting. This was followed by the competition phase in 2022 and design based on the results of the participation process. Finally, construction was carried out from May 2023 to June 2024.



Enhancing recreational areas with greenery and furniture:
The Nibelungenplatz invites passersby to linger.

Photo:
Rhea Dessovic / DnD GmbH

Nibelungenplatz is situated between the Aupromenade along the Danube River and the local Town Hill which is housed in a former Minorite monastery. Part of the square was maintained for vehicle traffic and continues to act as a car park, but the space was greened and secured with infiltrating paved tiles. Towards the Danube, an open park landscape now unites the former monastery building with the riverbank. Thirty-eight new trees and large-scale unsealing generated a lot of media attention. Newspapers reported about the "Miracle of Tulln", of sprouting greenery in a former car park. These reports and the positive response among the population demonstrate the need for more projects like this.

ST. PÖLTEN: MAKING THE RING GREEN

In St. Pölten, the capital of Lower Austria with roughly 50,000 inhabitants, another pioneering project is currently underway that is inspiring imitators both in Austria and internationally. The promenade ring that surrounds the old town of St. Pöltner was previously reserved exclusively for vehicle traffic. Now along its 2.3 kilometres, a multi-functional footpath and bike path network is under construction with shaded playgrounds and rest areas, gastronomy zones and open recreational areas. This strengthens the urban fabric and gives the city a new, modern identity.

The new trees are also planted in extensive sponge city areas that allow plenty of room for roots and collect rainwater. Along the promenade ring as well, the key design criteria come from a participation process: For this redesign project, the city collected ideas and concerns from the population during two years. Implementation is now being carried out step-by-step to allow the local residents to get used to the new segments. The first construction section in the southern area of the city was completed in summer 2024 and has already received lots of positive feedback. In the coming years, work will begin on the western and eastern sections of the ring.



Unsealed area with newly planted trees, seating areas and clear separation of footpath and bike path.

Photo:
Sabine Dessovic / DnD GmbH

SPONGE CITIES IN PRACTICE

Thanks to its special, extensive substrate structure, the sponge city gives more space for roots underground. A surface that is open to infiltration but can be walked and driven on is laid on top, allowing water to enter the sponge city and remain available there for the trees. In Tulln, eleven of the 38 newly planted trees are in similar spots with increased pressure of use, i.e. car parks or multi-purpose areas, where there is frequent vehicle traffic. These trees were planted in underground sponge city areas. Trees in green areas or large beds do not require this support.

As part of integrated rainwater management, the underground water storage systems in Tulln and St. Pölten proved extremely effective in fall 2024, when days of rainfall in the region provoked historic flooding in many places, while both the new Nibelungenplatz and the completed section of the promenade ring withstood the heavy rains without a problem. In St. Pölten, according to the Austrian national weather and climate service, the Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics (ZAMG), 447 mm of precipitation fell in just a few days. This is roughly half the annual level of precipitation. On the promenade ring, this enormous quantity of water was able to fully seep away, considerably alleviating the situation for the town's sewer system. With a view to future-proof urban planning and climate adaptation in communities, this project has been rightly regarded as pioneering. It is a shining example of how climate-conscious urban planning even on a small scale can have large effects, and delivers practical findings for cities and communities worldwide that are facing similar challenges.

As part of integrated rainwater management, the underground water storage systems in Tulln and St. Pölten proved extremely effective (...) when days of rainfall in the region provoked historic flooding in many places (...).

Quote: Sabine Dessovic



The new urban space on the promenade ring: open for use, green and showcasing a clear design identity.

Photo:
Sabine Dessovic / DnD GmbH

BIOGRAPHY



Sabine Dessovic

is a landscape architect, urban planner and co-founder of the DnD Landschaftsplanung office in Vienna. Her projects combine sophisticated design with ecological resilience. She is a member of multiple professional juries and urban development commissions and collaborates on participatory planning processes.

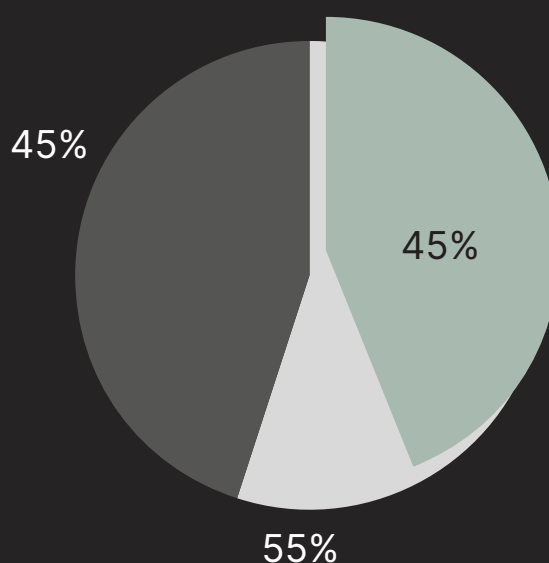
Photo:
DnD GmbH

SEALING | MAJOR URBAN CITIES.

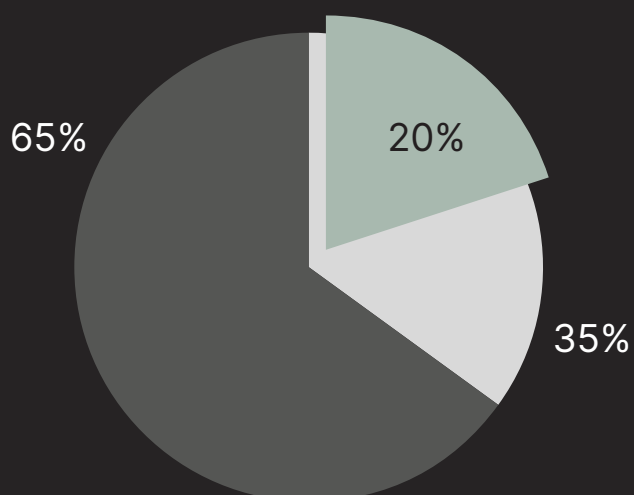
In order to counteract urban overheating, many European cities rely on green areas and open spaces. However, the percentage of unsealed areas varies greatly in some places.

● Sealed areas ● Unsealed areas ● Urban greenery

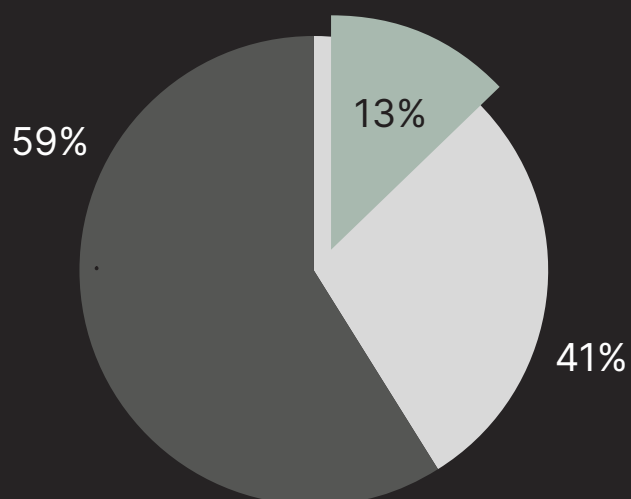
BERLIN



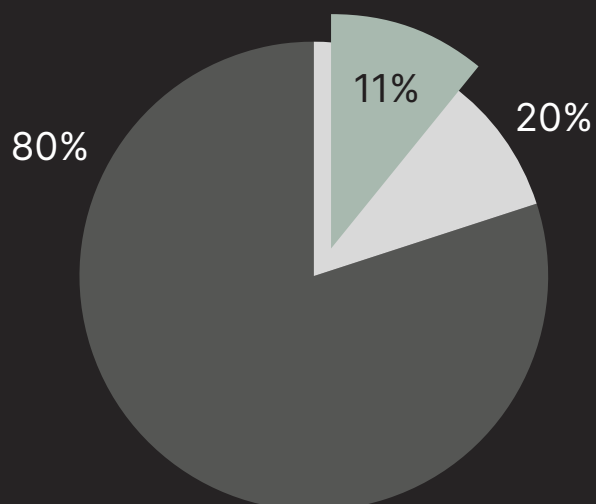
PARIS



MILAN



ATHENS



07

THE BARCELONA
SUPERBLOCKS:TURNING CITY STREETS
INTO LIVELY, GREEN
AND HEALTHY SITES.Streets as spaces for living –
not just for transit.

Urban planner Xavier Matilla Ayala reports on Barcelona's 'Superblocks', a model that has become internationally influential. His article demonstrates how reallocating street space can generate new urban qualities – for health, climate, and community.

Since the origin of the city, the streets have been the central place of urban vitality. The place of meeting and exchange in the broadest sense. The streets have also been the place of mobility, of movement, but in a way that is compatible with other activities such as children's play, recreation, meetings, strolls, celebrations, rest, popular festivals, cultural activities and even protests and riots. In other words, the street is the place where real urban life takes place, where people become citizens, where the city makes sense as a collective space.



Everyday life in redesigned streets: Green spaces, shade and accessible paths turn Barcelona's Superblocks into social public areas.

Photo:
RdA Suisse | flickr | CC BY 2.0

THE CAR-CENTRIC CITY

Unfortunately, the industrial city and especially the appearance of private cars meant the radical transformation of the streets. The obsession with a functional, productive and efficient city turned the streets into a mere place for mobility and transport, dominated and occupied by motor vehicles. Asphalt appeared, community life disappeared from neighbourhoods, the air became polluted, noise and accidents increased, and an increasingly individualistic and solitary lifestyle took hold. Then came the impacts of climate change, making even more evident the need for a profound review of what our streets and urban lifestyles should be.

RETHINKING URBAN STREETS

It is clear the streets need to be redefined as liveable public spaces, as community spaces, as the extension of housing, inclusive spaces that boost the local life of neighbourhoods, as a new healthy built environment, but how? In Barcelona, the superblock strategy has made it possible to initiate a process of transformation of its streets into a new one.

With a dense and compact urban fabric, with public facilities well distributed throughout the city, we can say that Barcelona is already a city of proximity. Nevertheless, it is a city with some major problems in its public space. There is a significant deficit of green spaces, with a total average of only 7 m² of green space per inhabitant. There are no large parks in Barcelona, only a few medium-sized ones, which is why we often say that Barcelona is a city essentially made up of streets and squares. There is a serious problem of pollution, both atmospheric and acoustic, due to a mobility model that continues to prioritise the use of the car in the streets. Moreover, the urban fabric is very poorly adapted to the new climatic conditions, which already suffer from the heat island effect.

WHAT IS THE SUPERBLOCKS STRATEGY?

Therefore, if the city wants to improve its environmental and health conditions by increasing urban greenery and reducing pollution and heat, it has no other solution than to transform its street network. This is why the superblocks strategy makes the most sense in a city like Barcelona, and perhaps why it was born there.

The Superblocks strategy is based on the transition to a more efficient mobility model, a mobility that pollutes less and takes up less room. This can only be achieved by reversing the current situation and giving priority on the streets to pedestrians, bicycles and public transport over private cars. In this way we can reduce the number of streets that are necessary for through traffic and convert those that are not necessary into 'green axes', streets that can become a new type of street, adapted to climate change, with better environmental and health conditions, with new spaces that promote community life.

In Barcelona, the model began to be applied in various pilot experiences in two neighbourhoods, in 2016 in Poblenou and in 2018 in Sant Antoni. In 2019, the collected data showed the number of cars and pollution had been significantly reduced, and that social activities in the street had multiplied. So it was decided to scale up the idea to the whole city and accelerate the transformations. The proposal 'Green Axes' was presented, identifying on a map all the streets that would not be needed for through traffic mobility. This network is a new green and social infrastructure for the city as a whole, providing not only new conditions of proximity but also connecting all the natural urban spaces with the open spaces of the territory.

The Superblocks strategy is based on the transition to a more efficient mobility model, a mobility that pollutes less and takes up less room. This can only be achieved by reversing the current situation and giving priority on the streets to pedestrians, bicycles and public transport over private cars.

Quote: Xavier Matilla Ayala



The street as a place of encounter, play, and protest – Barcelona reclaims its public space.

Photo:
Barcelona City Council

THE EIXAMPLE MAKEOVER

And a priority intervention area was identified for the central district 'El Eixample', a compact and dense urban fabric, with a mesh of orthogonal streets conceived and designed solely for mobility that absorbs much of the mobility of vehicles passing through the city. Cars and asphalt occupy more than 60% of the surface and there is no street furniture to sit or stand on. The application of the Superblock concept in the Eixample involves a global reorganisation of mobility, freeing 1 out of 3 streets from through traffic and turning them into new green axes. The key issue is that on these green axes cars can circulate but are obliged to turn at every junction, which turns them into access streets, but not through streets, drastically reducing the number of vehicles circulating. In this way, a new network of 21 green axes and 21 squares can be created, acting as an environmental and social infrastructure, improving comfort and health conditions, increasing the presence of greenery and living spaces in a systemic and balanced way throughout the area. In addition, action is also being taken on the basic mobility routes, reducing traffic lanes to incorporate bus lanes and cycle lanes.

URBAN DESIGN IN ACTION: 2020-2023 INTERVENTIONS

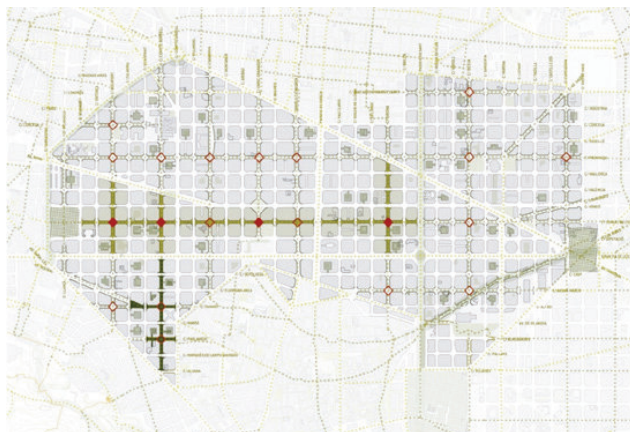
During the period 2020-2023 a first phase of green axes was developed and executed, which included sections of 4 streets: Consell de Cent, Rocafort, Borrell and Girona, as well as 4 squares at their intersections and at the junction of Enric Granados street, at the same time as new cycle lanes were implemented on the main mobility routes.

In the new green axes, people are the main protagonists of the new street model. A single platform of universal accessibility is configured, in which vehicles are guest agents and pedestrians always have priority, walking by the middle, enabling their free movement, transversal relations between facades and the appearance of places to stay with urban furniture. The street is treated as a three-dimensional environmental infrastructure that adapts to the impacts of climate change, improving health conditions, comfort, emotional well-being and biodiversity. The subsoil is regenerated, with a richer and more draining base. The permeable surface is increased, Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs) are incorporated and new vegetation and trees are planted. The streets have gone from being a space only for mobility to a space for being, a space on a human scale.

Superblocks prioritize pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport over cars.

Photo:
Barcelona City Council





The Eixample district transforms: from traffic grid to a new network of green axes and plazas.

Visual:
Barcelona City Council

The 4 new green axes and the 4 squares, since the day they opened up, have become very popular and highly valued by the residents. Benches and tables are places for many people to stay and meet. The squares have provided a new public space that is unprecedented and necessary in the Eixample and the green axes allow something that was impossible before, which is to walk from the centre of the street.

This first phase has involved the transformation of a total surface area of 110,000 m², with 4.65 km of green axes and 8,000 m² of squares. The pedestrian space has been increased by 58,000 m², the permeable surface has increased from 1% to 15%, the urban green space has been increased by 11,000 m², and 400 new trees of various species have been planted. The increase in shade and replacement of asphalt has reduced the surface temperature by 5°C in summer. The number of cars on the green axes and in the Eixample as a whole has been reduced by 17%.

The new green axes in Barcelona show that it is possible to transform streets into new spaces for collective life, for proximity, healthier and adapted to the new climatic conditions. And the virtue of the Superblocks strategy is that it can be perfectly adaptable to any urban fabric.

BIOGRAPHY



Xavier Matilla Ayala

is a Barcelona-based architect-urbanist. With over 20 years of experience as an urban and strategic planning consultant, he served as the city's Chief Architect from 2019 to 2023, leading key initiatives such as the Superblock program. He also teaches at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya and in the master's program at the IMB Institute of Barcelona.

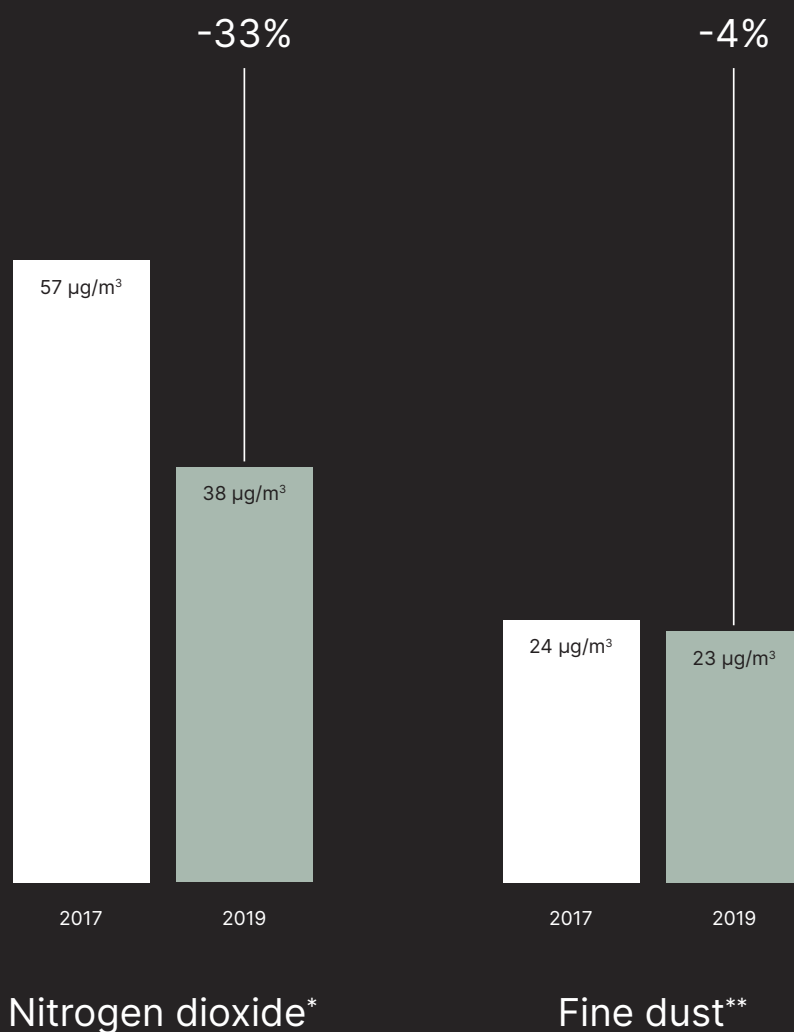
Photo:
Xavier Matilla Ayala

SUPERBLOCKS | BENEFITS.

Representative measurements demonstrate the positive effects of Barcelona's Superblocks. Between 2017 and 2019, air quality already improved noticeably. Noise pollution was also reduced.

POLLUTION

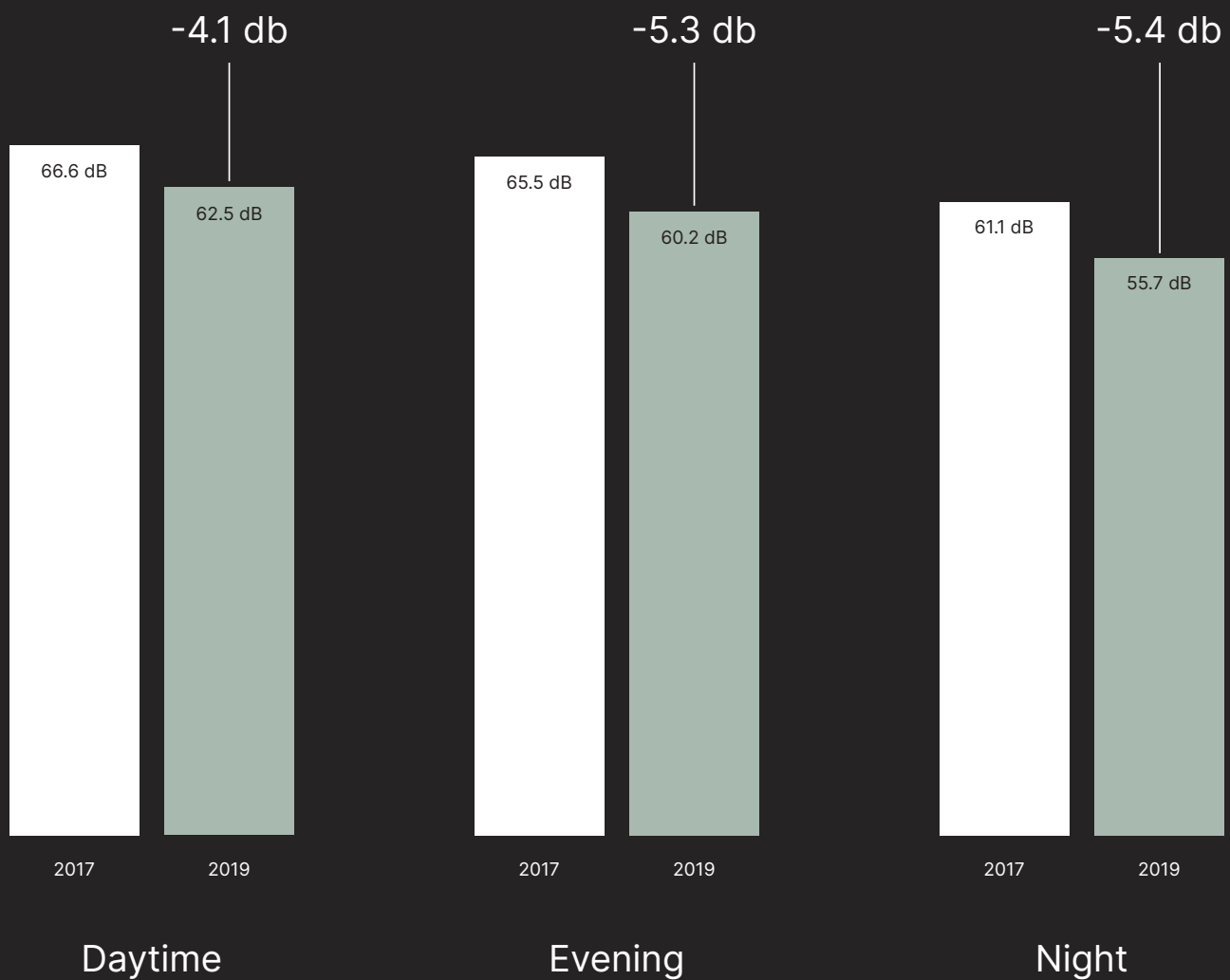
Deviation



* a chemical gas that is generated during combustion processes and is considered an air pollutant, can cause irritation of the respiratory tract and eyes

** can be inhaled and penetrate deep into the respiratory tract due to the low particle size of > 10 micrometres

NOISE



08

STRIKING A BALANCE
BETWEEN NATURE
AND URBAN DENSITY:THE KEY TO HAPPINESS
IN THE CITY?

How can urban design improve
the quality of life in public areas?

Caterina and Marc Aurel demonstrate how urban facilities represents a connecting element between people, nature and the city: functional, poetic, and adapted to the everyday life. Their contribution integrates the greening strategies in Paris to the question of how designs, materials and facilities shape the way people live together in urban areas – between memory and modernity.

Living well in a city center depends on numerous factors including the quality of public transport, the number and variety of public spaces as well as the cleanliness of those facilities and the quality of information available to residents. We all dream of limited vehicle traffic with easy access to alternative means of transport, from bikes or trams to rapid transit buses and the metro. Certainly, everyone would like cities that are less noisy and less polluted. But the way to achieve a vital balance is above all through the presence of green spaces, and more broadly through the concept of 'nature in cities'.

Stockholm, Copenhagen or Berlin are cities that have managed to maintain, through their history and urban development, a sense of harmony between building density and green spaces. Berlin has numerous parks, lakes and rivers where residents can relax. Stockholm, built on several islands in the North Sea, offers similar opportunities. Copenhagen has succeeded in conserving the quality of green spaces within the city through urban development. Several years ago, the city of Paris launched a participatory policy for the greening of its public spaces with its «Le permis de végétaliser» (Permission to green) initiative. This initiative spearheaded by neighbourhood associations and schools was the start of a wide-scale greening policy organised by the city government throughout the city of Paris and beyond.



In cooperation with the Parisian transport company, Aurel design urbain studied how future bus stops could offer users* added comfort and quality for their travel.

Photo:
Yann Monel

FACILITIES IN THE CITIES OF TOMORROW

Paris, one of the most densely populated cities in the world, has set the target of rendering 40% of its surface area infiltration-capable and greened by 2040, and of expanding the proportion of tree top canopy 2% by 2030. The target is also to expand the network of urban biodiversity corridors by fostering ecological continuity: planted promenades, alleys, medians, redesign of public squares, in part to improve the infiltration of ground surfaces while diversifying tree and plant species. A new green approach to public spaces where cars are restricted, offering residents more living areas.

We are in a new era in which cities are characterised by comfort and friendliness. Our quality of life increases when we are exposed to less noise, odours and visual stimulation. Nowadays our relationship with public spaces has evolved: they have become a place to live, an extension of our domestic space where urban facilities act as an interface between the city and us. The standardization and uniformity of our public spaces, along with our fast-paced lives, shape our perception of the city and reinforce the feeling of aggression or even exclusion.



A pleasant climate in urban areas is one of the major challenges posed by climate change.



Quote: Marc Aurel

In this context, urban facilities play a key role by helping to manage levels of physical and visual proximity, providing residents with comfort, safety and added value. The development of urban facilities is closely linked to the rise of new uses and practices in public spaces: playing sports, connecting, working, having breakfast, unwinding, improving waste management, etc. It is crucial to integrate these practices through careful scenography of our public spaces. To stimulate and delight our senses by working with material designs: to encourage heightened emotions, integration with green and natural spaces, reconnection with our environment.

The facilities have to accompany this further development of urban spaces by helping to integrate nature into the city. A pleasant climate in urban areas is one of the major challenges posed by climate change. Facilities that provides shelter from the sun and offers refreshing shade through greenery becomes an essential element. More and more communities are seeking to develop shading devices where planting in open ground is inviable due to the presence of underground supply networks.

This is the case in Hyères-les-Palmiers, where green roofs have been used to create recreational areas on the shopping streets of the city center. These large-scale structures encourage rapid growth of climbing plants that completely cover the structure to create a refreshing, fragrant canopy.

THE MATERIAL CHARACTER OF OBJECTS

Carefully selecting the surface treatments, utilising high-quality natural materials like ceramic or wood, and developing new ways for recycled material: all these approaches enrich our designs by incorporating specific expertise. The Re-bau collection of outdoor furniture, designed in a partnership with Emmaüs, is constructed using recycled parquet floors from the demolition site of a former gym. The wood parts are assembled in professional reintegration workshops. This approach relies on enhancing materials for more responsible facilities.



For more than twelve months, the bus stop located opposite the Gare de Lyon served as a laboratory.

Photo:
Yann Monel

THE PARIS METHOD: BETWEEN EXPERIMENTATION AND DEFINITION OF AN AESTHETIC VOCABULARY

Imagining new series of furniture for new urban practices is not something that happens overnight. Many parameters have to be considered, and these must be validated in advance to ensure optimal results. For this reason, Paris has experimented with facilities such as shading structures, seating, drinking fountains, and more. Over a given period, this makes it possible to verify the degree of acceptance, expectations for comfort and choice of location without forgetting to preserve aesthetic harmony with the existing facilities. The goal here is to establish a strong Parisian identity with urban facilities that connects memory and modernity. Organising these trial phases and installing prototypes in public spaces allows users and neighbourhood associations to reflect on how they can optimally make use of the facilities. These are short-term experiments over a course of several months that allow to further develop the facilities based on on-site feedback.

Within this context, in collaboration with RATP and the city of Paris, we implemented the Osmose project in 2015 which involved designing an experimental, interactive bus stop within existing transport services that featured a strikingly modern aesthetic but remained connected with the past through the choice of a soft plant-inspired design.

For more than 12 months, the Osmose bus stop located opposite the Gare de Lyon served as an experimental space to make the waiting time more comfortable for passengers: more intuitive signage, enhanced information, additional services, an open view of the city, seating furniture with a sophisticated design and many other elements aimed at making the bus travel more attractive.



Between tradition and modernity: the legendary Art Nouveau entrances designed by Hector Guimard for the metro in Paris still have an impact today, which can be felt in the project of Marwan Harmouche, Aurel Design Urbain.

Photo:
Marwan Harmouche

BIOGRAPHY



Caterina and Marc Aurel

run the Aurel Design Urbain office together. Together with their team, the architect/urban planner and designer specialise in the design of urban facilities and quality public spaces. They work for companies like AUBRILAM and BEGA as well as for major cities, from Lyon or Beirut all the way to Geneva.

Photo:
Aurel Design Urbain

Thanks to this test project, it resulted in expanding the technical specifications for future bus shelters in Paris by integrating features from the Osmose experiment: opening the shelter towards the city to improve access for persons with reduced mobility, versions of the shelter with various configurations to address constraints due to location and visitor traffic, seating areas on both the roadway and city sides making it possible to sit without entering the shelter, stronger signage for better visibility. These new bus shelters that we designed specifically for Paris, following the experience with Osmose, have become iconic aesthetic landmarks and a functional reference that have influenced the restructuring of the public transit network in Paris.

AN APPROACH BETWEEN MEMORY AND MODERNITY

It is necessary to reconcile memory and modernity without abandoning or clinging to the past. The past contains the colours of the future that feed into our projects with a contemporary mindset. Subway entrances have also undergone aesthetic and functional restructuring (Access 2030) to supplement the development of new lines. Our work here, balanced between memory and modernity, has shaped and affirmed the identity of the subway while giving it new visibility, through more effective signage, tailor-made lighting and high-quality materials.

The use of cast iron and brass gave a sophisticated touch to the entire project with a more artisanal approach to surface rendering and treatments. A creation that creates identity and succeeds in underlining its affiliation with the Parisian transport network.

This design office combines organic forms and materials such as cast iron and brass with effective communication of information and understated contemporary elegance.

Photo:
Marwan Harmouche

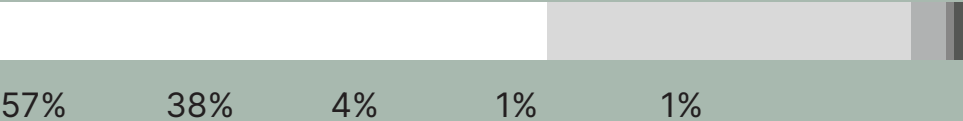


OPEN SPACE PLANNING | URBAN FURNITURE.

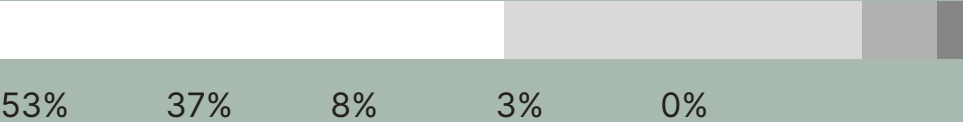
In a survey of 200 German designers, the respondents named important characteristics of urban furniture for sustainable, climate-resilient open space planning.



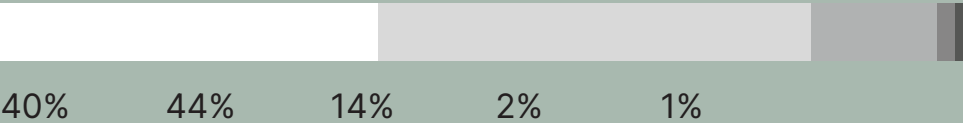
A STABLE DESIGN



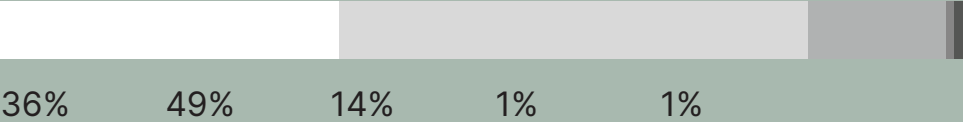
PROTECTION AGAINST VANDALISM



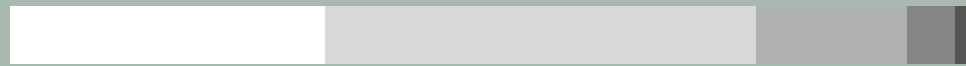
LOW-MAINTENANCE/EASY-CARE SOLUTIONS



USE OF RECYCLABLE MATERIALS SUCH AS METAL

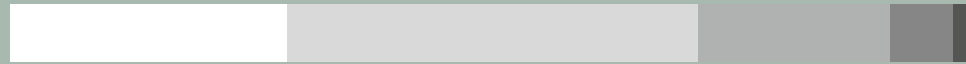


USE OF NATURAL MATERIALS SUCH AS WOOD



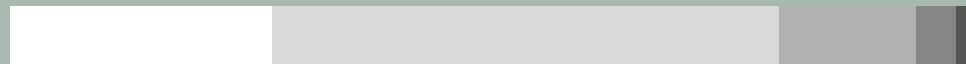
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PROTECTION AGAINST GRAFFITI/PAINTING



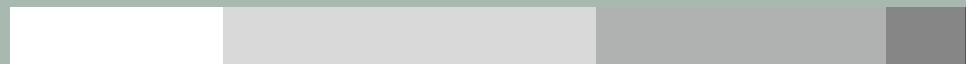
29% 43% 19% 7% 2%

ERGONOMIC, COMFORTABLE DESIGN



28% 53% 14% 5% 2%

WELL-THOUGHT-OUT, HIGH-QUALITY DESIGN



23% 39% 29% 9% 1%

09

THE CITY AS A FUTURE
LANDSCAPE.STATUS QUO, OUTLOOK,
DISCUSSION.

How can existing residential areas
be further developed
in a future-proof manner?

This question will be addressed by Andreas Hofer, Artistic Director of the 2027 International Building Exhibition in the Stuttgart urban region. The “IBA” format looks back on 100 years of history and is considered a laboratory for innovative urban development. In his contribution, Hofer describes the challenges and potentials of urbanised landscapes. Along the way, he outlines new planning and legal approaches as well as options for arranging resource cycles locally.

Cities were created because open spaces meant wilderness, and this was generally rough or even deadly. The exploration of the West in the USA continued well into the 19th century. People had to choose between dangerous nature and cities where they lived close together and epidemics broke out repeatedly. During the industrial revolution, cities expanded into the landscape, where they created their own “predators” in the form of factories: Powerful machines manufactured products and increased well-being. At the same time, they posed a threat to their operators. The work was dangerous and hours were often too long, the environment was polluted and people got sick. In order to protect their lives and living quarters, new labour laws were introduced, ideas for hygienic cities and spatial planning.



During the construction of the now inoperative factory site, the founders were concerned with living circumstances: On the spinning mill grounds by the Neckar River, the employees lived and worked as in a village. This will now be consolidated.

Visualisation:
Rustler Schriever Architekten with Gornik Denkel
Landscape architects

100 YEARS OF NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

The 2027 International Building Exhibition celebrates the 100th birthday of the Weissenhof Estate – one of the most influential construction projects of the 20th century. Created in the context of the Deutscher Werkbund exhibition “Die Wohnung” in 1927, the housing cluster in the Killesberg area of Stuttgart was a radical departure in architecture and planning culture. It was constructed in just one year, under the artistic guidance of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and is now considered a manifesto of functional modernism with far-reaching consequences for international urban design.

More integrative ideas, such as the Familistère in Guise, France, where industrial production was united with communal models and the everyday routines of workers in the mid-19th century, remained exotic exceptions. The same applies to the collectivist experiments in the young Soviet Union.

During and after the modern era, cities became more segregated. The new ideas flowed neatly into building regulations and were neatly subdivided into categories based on use: residential, commercial and industrial areas. With the economic boom after World War II, more city centres became pedestrian areas for undisturbed consumption and cultural use.

This spatial configuration spilled over extensively into neighbouring Germany and was consolidated in planning, construction and tax law. Nowadays, the unsightly German industrial areas generate local taxes, the residential zone houses the electorate, and retail business struggle to survive in precarious town centres (and heritage societies lament the loss of rural identities). Enormous traffic infrastructures open up and connect these different spaces.

100 years after the Weissenhof Estate: In the district around the Neckar spinning mill, the focus is on diversity of use rather than separating different functions.



CONSTRUCTED FAILURE

Visualisation:

Rustler Schriever Architekten with Gornik Denkel
Landscape architects



The field of urban development attempted to create new urban spaces, but this was neither successful in the residential areas close to the historic centres nor in the large housing estates intended to reduce pressure on the inner cities. It was only when expanding settlements began to overlap, and the city and countryside increasingly blended together, that a discourse was established which attempted to view this new entity as a whole and give it a name: Agglomeration, outskirts, suburbs or metropolitan area. These areas are generally unpopular and are seen as an error in urban development or as a high but necessary price for growth and well-being.

In the particularly densely populated regions of Europe – in Switzerland as well as Netherlands and Belgium – where this patchwork of development has been growing for a long time, a new awareness has grown in recent years: Can this new spatial category develop its own special quality? Is this possible even though the attempt to protect nature has failed in many places? Isn't it disparaging to talk about "urban sprawl" when this is where the majority of people live? What are the keys for guiding this highly complex structure, which was created more by chance and market forces than by a creative hand, into a successful future?

LOCAL SOLUTIONS FOR RESOURCE CYCLES

First there is “pragmatic empathy”, and then open spaces. For a long time, cities had an exchange relationship with the countryside when it came to resources. That was where food, water and energy came from. In exchange, the rural areas received security, administration, products and waste. In a largely urbanised area, this system no longer works: resource cycles have to be closed locally.

The keywords here are urban gardening, green-blue infrastructure, mobility revolution, circular economy and climate adaptation. These topics have arrived in the city. Nevertheless, urban gardening has yet to demonstrate its economic potential.

The transformation of traffic and parking areas, a fundamental step for unsealing and slowing down, progresses hesitantly. And decorating prestige buildings with technical greenery is mostly green-washing. These extensive structural designs cause ecological damage that the poor plants are unable to remedy in their tight constraints.

Quote: Andreas Hofer

While debates rage about saving individual trees and building density vs. open space, there is often confusion between climate change and climate adaptation. The percentage of space covered by urban greenery is too small to have a real effect on climate protection; its potential is too small for the ecosystem. Cities in the south such as Madrid, however, demonstrate very well that alleys of trees, unsealed surfaces, uncovered bodies of water and building shade from large buildings with a high construction density can make public areas bearable in hot climate zones.

In the wider area surrounding the centres, the picture is entirely different. In sealed industrial areas, large-scale cleared agriculture and sprawling metropolitan suburbs, there is enormous potential for ecological improvement with effects in multiple dimensions. Renewable energies can be generated here in significant volumes, the key for sustainable mobility is here, agricultural production can be efficient and regulate the climate here. And even in unpopular housing estate areas, there is enough roof space and separating areas to facilitate self-sufficiency and biodiversity.

TOWARDS THE CITY AS A FUTURE LANDSCAPE.

If we resolutely comprehend metropolitan areas as a new landscape, created by people but capable of being designed according to bio-ecological principles, if we stop simply upholding beautiful oases such as parks and city centres as rigid monuments in a sea of indifference, but instead explore the beauty in car parks outside of retail shops, in industrial areas and the varying residential models of the suburbs, we will break away from the narrow view of city centres and become gardeners in a new wider space: the city as a landscape of the future.

100 years after the Weissenhof Estate, the 2027 International Building Exhibition for the urban region of Stuttgart is working to create this vision. Extended commercial spaces, former industrial areas, infrastructures such as large hospitals and educational campuses from the 1960s and housing estates on the outskirts of the city are the showcases of this transformation. Nevertheless, it is clear that this journey will be long and difficult.

Apart from technical and legal obstacles, the ideas in people's minds can only be changed with a great deal of persuasion. But this is exactly where an experimental format like an IBA can be a valuable tool. On site, in persistent discussions and with the solid argument of the urgency of change, it can take the first steps toward a more sustainable and beautiful future. It creates a vision of the region in which different uses overlap and people discover new synergies with nature.

Neighbourhood of the Generations east of Stuttgart:
In Schorndorf, directly by the Rems River, a dense, mixed district for living and working is currently under construction.

Visualisation:
Consortium Schürmann+Witry Architects,
Miriam Stümpfl Architect and Urban Planner and
Blank Landscape Architects





Winding alleys with small houses and squares that offer unexpected views – the character of Schorndorf's old town centre south of the train station will be expanded across the tracks on a rougher commercial scale.

This urban landscape of the future does not require any utopias of tearing down and reconstruction, or green skyscrapers with technically elaborate irrigation systems: instead, it involves reconquering and descaling the urban land, appreciating buildings as part of an ecosystem and a firm design hand that protects the public interest. The IBA wants to prove that this can be achieved in the city and region of Stuttgart with its innovative projects: The area around replacement constructions for cooperative residential buildings in Stuttgart-Rot and Münster is transformed from green space into a versatile living area, a dense and socially integrated neighbourhood is being constructed in Schorndorf on the predominantly sealed surface of the former works yard, and during the conversion and expansion of the Neckar spinning mill – after more than 150 years of textile production – the goal of an energetically and ecologically positive balance seems achievable.



Visualisation:
Consortium Schürmann+Witry Architects,
Miriam Stümpfl Architect and Urban Planner
and Blank Landscape Architects

If the compass of values is now recalibrated and a consensus is created about future-oriented development, then it will be possible to move away from unproductive control and permit mechanisms as well as a culture of mistrust that poisons the planning process, towards a more constructive, goal-oriented dialogue. The goal of achieving quality with increasing regulation has failed in any case. This is the best argument for launching a new era in the spirit of the “Gründerzeit” (founders’ period), the period of rapid expansion following industrialisation in late 19th century Germany. All the same, this new era is not merely looking backward and is well aware of the social upheavals of the first Gründerzeit: instead, it will carry forward the fragments from a turbulent history into sustainable living spaces.

BIOGRAPHY



Andreas Hofer

studied architecture at ETH Zurich and was a partner there in the planning and architecture office Archipel. Since early 2018, he is the Artistic Director of the 2027 International Building Exhibition in the Stuttgart urban region – IBA ,27 for short. As part of this format, groundbreaking projects in architecture, urban development and open space planning will be tested and made visible to the public over the course of several years. The central focus of IBA ,27 is the question of how urbanised landscapes can be further developed in times of climate change, scarce resources and social change..

Photo:
IBA'27/Sven Weber

URBAN DEVELOPMENT | THE CITY OF THE FUTURE.

When surveyed about their wishes for the future of urban development, 1,019 German respondents clearly prioritised the expansion of green open spaces over social or technical benefits.

Here, the following applies:

0 = not desirable at all

10 = highly desirable

URBAN WILDERNESS 7.7

WASTE-FREE CITY 7.6

LIVING SPACE FOR ALL 7.5

SMART CITY 7.4

CAR-FREE CITY 7.4

SPONGE CITY 7.3

SELF-SUFFICIENT CITY 7.3

DIRECT DEMOCRATIC CITY 6.6

SHARING CITY 5.9



AFTERWORD.

This publication aims to inspire and inform, give space for ideas and stimulate new ideas.

But it is also clear: we are still at the beginning of the transition to open spaces and there is still a long way to go. We invite you to become part of this journey:

republic-space.org

Or get involved yourself. For example when talking to colleagues, with customers or – to get right down to it – on future projects.

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