POLIS
7 LESSONS FROM THE EUROPEAN PRIZE OF URBAN PUBLIC SPACE
**polis**

/ˈpolɪs/; πόλις

Literally means city in Greek. In Ancient Greece, it could also mean citizenship and body of citizens.

The 28 most outstanding works of the first nine editions of the European Prize for Urban Public Space constitute a gauge of the democratic quality of Europe’s urban and social fabrics. They have been grouped here around seven headings that have emerged as empirically learned lessons: memory, mobility, mixture, waterfront, margins, marketplace and democracy. They all confirm the social and political dimension that permeates the city and which is so well reflected in the Greek term polis.
The city is far from being an idyllic paradise, the aesthetic setting that is so often showcased by architecture or landscaping design, tourist brochures or municipal propaganda. Just when urban dwellers have come to constitute more than half the world’s population, one of the greatest artefacts created by humanity is facing threats that give rise to serious doubts as to its future. Everywhere, the urban habitat is growing and changing in such an ill-conceived way that coexistence within its bounds is open to question.

Europe which, throughout history, has produced cities that are exemplary in terms of their compactness, diversity and human scale, is no exception to these dangers. Its cities are constantly subjected to urban transformations which repeatedly end up as the weapon that deals the death blow to the collective project of urban civility. All too often, urban planning has demonstrated how it can be used for social control or real-estate profiteering, and how much damage it can cause to the environment and natural resources.

Fortunately, however, European cities can also offer many examples of good practice and have shown that a better city is possible: a city that is more habitable and inclusive for everyone, where wealth and opportunities are distributed among citizens and handed down through the generations.

The European Prize for Urban Public Space aims to recognise and make known successful examples of different applications of this democratic conception of the city. Over its sixteen years of existence, the Prize—which is organised by the Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB) together with six other European institutions—has become an observatory with privileged perspectives on problems and solutions of the most diverse nature.

Demonstrating these experiences, the 28 works selected for this exhibition constitute a gauge of the democratic quality of Europe’s urban and social fabrics. They have been grouped here as seven areas that have emerged as empirically learned lessons: memory, mobility, mixture, waterfront, margins, marketplace and democracy. They all call attention to the social and political dimensions permeating the city, and which are so well reflected in the Greek term polis. After all, as we shape cities, cities shape us.
The city came before us and will survive us. In this space shared not only among contemporaries but with their predecessors and successors as well, collective memory is an essential tool. It hands down society’s richness from one generation to another so that, rather than starting out from zero, each one begins from an advanced position. Yet it also a double-edged sword. The city’s legacies are indiscriminately superimposed on the urban palimpsest where painful traumas are indistinguishable from unforgivable oblivion, and lost treasures from obsolescence that needs to be brought up to date.

Sometimes it becomes necessary to combat the negative feeling that can permeate a place damaged by war or disaster. On other occasions, it is only necessary to recall that recycling heritage is both saving and enrichment. There are times when discoveries from the past can afford lessons that are very pertinent for today. Eventually, the absence of conserved remains obliges us to invent new ways of addressing the past. After all, every memory is a creative act and, if it manages to avoid nostalgia and tabula rasa, it can rescue from the past values that are extremely useful and significant for both present and future.

**Nantes. France**

**Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery**

Developers: Nantes Metropole, City of Nantes

Authors: Wodiczko + Bonder, architecture, art & design

Special Mention 2012

**Krakow. Poland**

**Heroes of the Ghetto Square**

Developer: City of Kraków

Authors: Biuro Projektow Lewicki Latak, Piotr Lewicki & Kazimierz Latak

Special Mention 2006

**Berlin. Germany**

**Volkspalast**

Developers: Sophiensäle (HAU), PRISMA Zentrum für Standort

Authors: ZwischenPalastNutzung / Volkspalast, Philipp Oswalt

Special Prize of the Jury 2006

**Szczecin. Poland**

**Dialogue Centre «Przelomy» at Solidarność Square**

Developer: National Museum of Szczecin

Authors: KWK Promes. Robert Konieczny

Joint Winner 2016
The city is only within reach of those who can move around in it. The ever-increasing demands of the private vehicle have compounded the inordinate expansion of the metropolis and brought to a suffocating standstill historic city centres inherited from times when pedestrians ruled the streets. Many cities are afflicted by senseless and unjust mobility which handicaps people in accordance with their age or acquisitive power, squanders time and quality of life, and puts in jeopardy the resources of coming generations, making the world they will inherit less habitable. However, the re-conquest of more equitable and sustainable mobility is already underway. In recent times, many cities have decided to oust badly parked cars from squares and streets they had taken over, to civilise traffic so that it can coexist with pedestrians and cyclists, and made a commitment to modes of transport where the experience of travelling together makes more sense, is more democratic and even enjoyable.

**Helsinki.** Finland  
*Baana Pedestrian and Bicycle Corridor*  
Developer: Helsinki City  
Author: Helsinki City Planning, Helsinki Public Works Department, Loci Landscape Architects  
Special Mention 2014

**Paris.** France  
*Renovation of Place de la République*  
Developers: City of Paris / Department of Roads and Transport  
Authors: TVK Architectes Urbanistes  
Finalist 2014

**London.** United Kingdom  
*Reform of Exhibition Road*  
Developer: Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea  
Authors: Dixon Jones Architects  
Special Mention 2012

**Malmö.** Sweden  
*Elsewhere*  
Developers: Trafikverket, Statens konstråd, Informationsteknik Malmö  
Author: Tania Ruiz  
Special Mention 2012
Modernity has approached the city from an excessively functionalist standpoint. Both private initiative and public planning have tended to fragment urban land into overly specialised and poorly connected zones. Compartmentalisation of residential, business and recreational areas has not only engendered monotonous, uninviting and clichéd landscapes but it has also produced spatial segregation and senseless mobility which almost invariably lead to serious social exclusion. Mixture needs to be recovered as a value that the city must never waive.

Diversity should be cherished among people of different origins and social strata. This is achieved by urban transformations which combine a variety of uses, typologies and scales in some particular place, turning it into a setting for coexistence now endowed with dynamism and centrality, and even more so if this is the result of complex processes in which several branches of the administration work together, disciplines are mixed and coherent networks of different specific actions are woven together. After all, each city should reflect the complexity of the society which inhabits it.

Molenbeek-Saint-Jean. Belgium
New Multi-Purpose Canopy
Author: BAUKUNST
Developer: Commune de Molenbeek-Saint-Jean
Special Mention 2016

Copenhagen. Denmark
Superkilen
Developers: Flemming Borreskov, City of Copenhagen
Authors: BIG - Bjarke Ingels Group
Selected 2012

London. United Kingdom
Improvement of Barkingside Town Centre
Developers: Greater London Authority, London Borough of Redbridge
Authors: DK-CM
Special Mention 2016

Zaanstad. Netherlands
A8ernA
Developers: City of Zaanstad
Authors: Pieter Bannenberg, Walter Van Dijk, Kamiel Klaasse, Mark Linnemann, NL Architects
Joint Winner 2006
Having access to the sea is a priceless asset for a city. The seafront is much more than a first-rate cultural and commercial gateway or a privileged leisure and swimming space. It is also a façade by means of which the city recognises itself, the face that gives it an identity. Nevertheless, the city’s relationship with the sea is unstable and can even be conflictive. Ports and beaches in many cities have oscillated between the marginality of hard times and the congestion of booms. Accordingly, coastal cities periodically reappraise themselves in terms of their relationship with the sea. Some have polluted, obsolete ports which need to be recovered as spaces for citizens. Others have to restore productivity to fishing and the nautical trades. Still others must channel tourist pressures or real-estate effervescence whipped up by the desire to look out at a horizon. All of them, however, are seeking the best way to manage their permanent encounter with the water.

Oslo. Norway
Norwegian Opera House
Developer: STATSBYGG
Author: SNØHETTA
Joint Winner 2010

Marseille. France
Redevelopment of the Old Port
Developers: Marseille Metropole / Department of Infrastructures
Authors: Michel Desvigne Paysagiste MDP, Foster + Partners, Tangram, INGEROP, AIK
Joint Winner 2014

Copenhagen. Denmark
“Havnebadet”
Developers: City of Copenhagen
Authors: BIG, PLOT A/S, Julien de Smedt
Special Mention 2004

Zadar. Croatia
“Sea Organ”
Developer: City of Zadar
Author: Nikola Bašić
Joint Winner 2006
Cities have lost their old ability to finish themselves. For decades now, the burgeoning presence of the private vehicle has escalated urban planning incontinence, inflicting serious wounds in the urban fabric itself and blurring the limits separating it from nature. The periphery, a no-man’s land between the two domains, is home to freewheeling construction in zones prone to flooding, giant metropolitan rubbish dumps and populations segregated by large-scale infrastructure.

Accessibility can very often be the key to remedying this endless mess. It can take the form of peri-urban parks, stitching together the edges of the urban fabric and inviting people to visit the outskirts and include them as part of the map of the known city. It can also help in surmounting barriers imposed by big motorways, making them permeable or even transforming them into habitable spaces. In short, accessibility brings civility to the fringes of built-up territory.

**Caldes de Montbui.** Spain  
*Recovery of the Irrigation System at the Thermal Orchards*  
Authors: Ciclica [space, community & ecology] and Cavaa Arquitectes  
Developer: Municipality of Caldes de Montbui

Joint Winner 2016

**Frankfurt am Main.** Germany  
*Former Maurice Rose Airfield*  
Developer: Stadt Frankfurt am Main Grünflächenamt  
Author: GTL Gnüchtel Triebswetter Landschaftsarchitekten

Selected 2006

**London.** United Kingdom  
*Opening of Rainham Marshes*  

Special Mention 2014

**Begues.** Spain  
*Vall d’en Joan Landfill Restoration*  
Developers: Barcelona Metropolitan Area, Barcelona County Council  
Authors: Enric Batlle, Joan Roig, Teresa Gali-Izard

Joint Winner 2004
As a place where abilities are divided up and shared out to create a complex system of reciprocities, every city is a market. This means that cities are places of opportunity and, far from being exclusive products of their own circumstances of birth, are made up of an accumulation of newcomers attracted by the possibility of being part of their fertile communality. Yet these exemplary centres of sharing and interchange are prone to abuse seeking to concentrate opportunities in the hands of a few to the detriment of the general interest and collective intelligence. When deindustrialisation moves factories and labour offshore to distant places where it is more profitable to exploit workers and the environment, very few people gain. The same thing happens when small businesses are supplanted by global franchises, or when large shopping malls proliferate in city outskirts, urging irresponsible consumption and producing more waste, worse working conditions and still greater concentration of wealth. Cities must try to find more just and sustainable models of production and consumption if they wish to conserve their time-honoured prolificacy.

**MARKETPLACE**

**Vodice. Croatia**
**Harbour Market**
Developer: Public Utility company Leć d.o.o.
Authors: Dinko Peracic
Finalist 2016

**Ripoll. Spain**
**“La Lira Theatre”**
Developer: City of Ripoll
Authors: RCR Aranda Pigem Vilalta Arquitectes SLP | Joan Puigcorbé
Special Mention 2014

**Colombes. France**
**“R-Urban”: Network of Urban Commons**
Developer: Ville de Colombes, The LIFE Programme (European Union)
Authors: Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée
Finalist 2016

**Istanbul. Turkey**
**Besiktas Fish Market**
Developer: Municipality of İstanbul Beşiktaş
Author: Gokhan Avcioglu
Selected 2010
The city is not always a shared project. Unfortunately, there are too many occasions when the administration is weak, ineffective or negligent, not to mention corrupt or opposed to the general interest. Neither is it unusual for citizens to opt for indifference, disaffection or individualism. When this happens, the city deteriorates and is impoverished as it becomes more conflictive and much less habitable. The only remedy for these ills is more democracy. However, democracy tends not to trickle down. It must be conquered and defended in a permanent struggle which, while it may sometimes be illegal, is always legitimate. Residents who are aware of their right to the city and their power to make it effective lead the struggle, joined by citizens and civil society organisations which, from the most basic demands to the most extraordinary achievements, are committed to the collective dimension of the city. Together they denounce, demand, disobey, occupy, participate and work cooperatively to bring about improvement, whether it is in a neighbourhood or in democracy itself.
The panels consist of modular aluminum frames and printed fabrics.

The exhibition consists of the following items:
- 1 panel of introductory text (180 x 180 cm)
- 1 panel of credits (organisers, sponsors, agreed between the CCCB and hosting institution; 90x180 cm)
- 7 thematic blocks, each one consisting of text on the theme and four projects (360cm x 180cm each block)
1. **SEVEN VIDEOS** that illustrate each one of seven thematic blocs:

The videos combine recording of the sites with Jury members’ impressions and statements. In English:

- **MEMORY**: Dialogue Centre “Przełomy” at Solidarność Square, Szczecin
- **MOBILITY**: “Baana”: pedestrian and bicycle corridor, Helsinki
- **MIXTURE**: New multi-purpose Canopy, Molenbeek-Saint-Jean
- **WATERFRONT**: Redevelopment of the Old Port, Marseille
- **MARGINS**: Recovery of the Irrigation System at the Thermal Orchards, Caldes de Montbui
- **MARKETPLACE**: "La Lira" Theatre, Ripoll
- **DEMOCRACY**: "Heavenly Hundred" Garden, Kiev
2. **“SHARED SPACES”:** A selection of short interviews with well-known figures from the domains of architecture, science and the humanities, who describe their experiences with and thoughts on public space. 60 min, in English or subtitled in English.

*Richard Sennett*, New York (USA), Sociologist and writer, professor at the London School of Economics (LSE)

*Zygmunt Bauman*, Poznan (Poland), Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Leeds and the University of Warsaw

*Lydia Cacho*, Mexico City, Journalist, writer and activist, who is internationally renowned for her struggle to defend human rights

*Doreen Massey*, Manchester (United Kingdom), Writer and emeritus professor at the Open University

Optional video:

3. **Documentary “EUROPE CITY”:** the film wonders if there is still such a thing as a European model of the city: compact, densely-populated, organised around complex uses and a mixture of populations. It analyses the role of public spaces in that context looking at the winning works in the European Prize for Urban Public Space. Coproduction of the CCCB and Spanish television RTVE. 60 min, subtitled in English or Spanish.
The exhibition has been designed and produced in such a way that transporting it is uncomplicated and inexpensive. All the pieces comprising it can be folded, unfolded and stored in trunks with wheels, which makes moving it much easier.

The components of the exhibition travel dismantled inside 2 boxes with wheals measuring:
- 86 cm (99 cm with casters) x 195 cm x 55 cm
- 46 cm (58 with casters) x 195 cm x 54 cm

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The exhibition is very adaptable and fits into different architectural spaces. Panels, organised in thematic groups and videos can be distributed according to possibilities and characteristics of available space.

There are two basic settings:
TRAVELLING EXHIBITION. Mounting versions
There is an optional possibility of creating an annex to the exhibition which would deal with local examples of interventions in public space. A selection of works that have revitalised local urban spaces could be presented, together with experiences that the city administration or urban activist groups have worked on. The annex would involve the local architectural community and could be accompanied by presentations or round-table discussions about their work, as well as guided tours. Local media could easily be mobilised to raise a public debate on the city’s transformation.

Example of the Museum of German Architecture, Frankfurt, 2010

Example of the Museum of Finnish Architecture, Helsinki, 2015 (panels in slated position)
Parallel activities such as guided tours, debates, workshops or activities for children usually accompany the travelling exhibition, involving participants from a wide range of disciplines, both local and international.