



UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



VITAL PUBLIC SPACES:

Designing and managing public spaces for inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities

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Charter of Public Space / Biennial of Public Space

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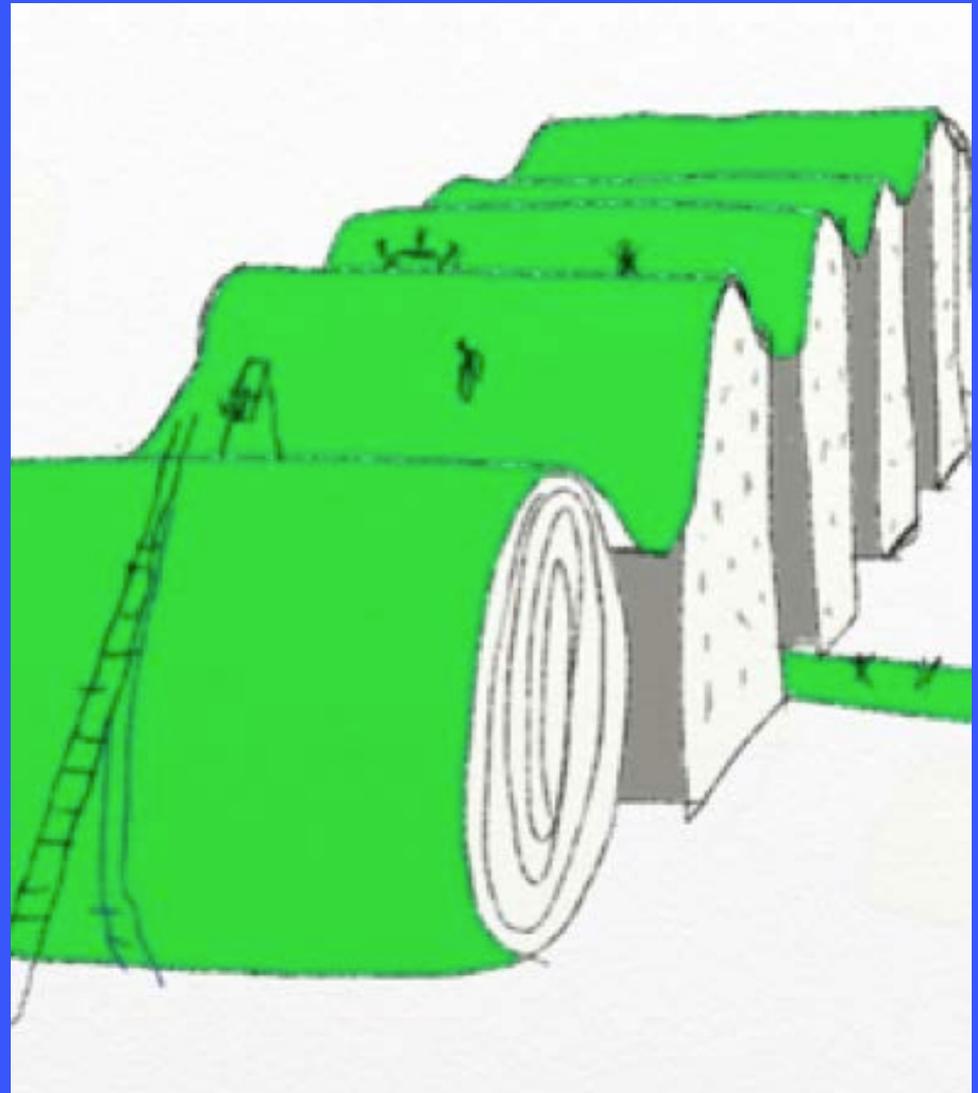
The Biennial of Public Space

The Biennial of Public Space is a unique international rendez-vous for all those who are interested in exchanging notes on how to promote better cities through the improvement of public spaces for all.

The BiSP2015 is co-ordinated by INU, INU Lazio, the National Council of Architects and its Rome-based Regional Guild of Architects.

The Biennial is held in Rome in a newly conquered public space, the former abattoir, and hosted by the Department of Architecture of the city's third university.

The first edition was held in 2011.



A Biennial unique output: the Charter of Public Space

At the Biennial's first edition, participants decided there was a need for a document offering a shared definition of public space and outlining constraints and principles for achieving good public spaces for all in our cities.



The Charter Process

The “Charter Process” was launched in Naples, at the VI World Urban Forum.

In drafting the Charter, a dedicated working group used the Biennale’s website as a public arena to collect thoughts and proposals and develop a text over a period of several months.

At the Biennale’s concluding event, in May 2013, a special drafting workshop discussed and completed a final draft in Italian and English.

The draft was then adopted at the Biennale’s final plenary.



The Charter's Content

The Charter consists of only five pages.

Introduced by a brief preamble, it presents a definition of public space and a description of the main typologies of public space.

The body of the text contains principles for three interrelated moments of the public space life cycle – creation, management, enjoyment.

A brief section is also devoted to the main constraints to the achievement of accessible and enjoyable public spaces.

The following document constitutes the contribution of the Biennial of Public Space to a process of further definition on the same subject that will be conducted at the global level in collaboration with the United Nations Programme on Human Settlements (UN-Habitat), in order to make a significant contribution to the preparatory process of the third Conference of the United Nations on Human Settlements to be held in 2016.

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Preamble

1. In addition to the need to exhibit good projects and exemplary realizations, the Biennial of Public Space is also born out of a strong need to support the desire, shared by many citizens and long-sighted and efficient public administrators, to make public space the banner of urban civility.
2. The main criteria this document is based on are that a) it is useful to formulate a clear and comprehensive definition of public space, b) that public space should be regarded as a *public good*, c) that the Charter should contain reasonable and shared principles with regard to the conception, the design, the realization, the management, the transformability and the enjoyment of public space, d) that it must be a concise document and, just like public space, accessible to all.
3. The Charter of Public Space aims at serving all those who believe in the city and in its extraordinary ability for hospitality, solidarity, conviviality and sharing; in its inimitable virtue in encouraging social interaction, encounter, togetherness, freedom and democracy; and in its calling for giving life to these values through public space. At the same time, cities show the worsening of economic, social, ethnic, cultural and generational inequalities. Public space must be the place where citizenship rights are guaranteed and differences are respected and appreciated.
4. The charter is based on a wide and inclusive concept of citizenship that goes beyond its legal definition. All in their capacity, as users, are "citizens" and have the same rights and duties with regard to the public space.
5. When citizens coincide with the inhabitants they have the right to be involved through participatory processes in the creation and management of public space.

The Charter's definition of public space

“Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. Each public space has its own spatial, historic, environmental, social and economic features”



Photo: Eugenio Monti

Typologies and functions of Public Spaces

- Support market and commercial activities on which the vitality of the city depends
- Offer opportunities for recreation, physical exercise and regeneration for all
- Are the places of individual and collective memory
- Help promote education and culture
- Encourage conviviality, encounter, and freedom of expression
- Are an integral part of the city's architecture and landscape

“For the above characteristics, they represent the principal resource available to public administrations for building integrated policies, a broad range of urban planning, the morphological and functional upgrading of the urban fabric and social and economic regeneration”



Vendel Park, Amsterdam

Constraints

- Commodification (=commercializaion) of urban social life
- Decreasing public resources for the creation and maintenance of public spaces
- Weakening of social cohesion
- Pressures of speculative interests
- Poor design choices ignoring multifunctionality and structural connections
- Lack of effective public leadership
- Sectorialization of administrative structures and functions
- Vulnerability of existing public spaces to improper uses
- The perception of insecurity
- Conflict with virtual public space
- “Invisibility” due to poor signage and information



Creation of Public Space

Important factors to consider:

- Diversity
- Fostering citizenship
- Incorporating participation
- A systemic approach to public space
- Creativity
- Connectivity
- Multifunctionality
- Overcoming physical barriers
- Supply and location
- Maintenance costs
- Re-use of derelict sites
- Risk reduction
- Starting points for post-disaster strategies
- Job creation opportunities
- P.S. as opportunities for the design profession



Management of Public Space

Important factors to consider:

- Collaboration between local authorities, civil society and the private sector
- Reducing traffic for livability and environmental protection
- Educating for responsible use
- Recapturing land value increments due to public investment in creating and improving public space
- Integrating development and management
- Promoting “space appropriation”
- Reconciling multiple uses for streets, squares and sidewalks
- Privatization practices must be monitored and evaluated
- Encourage street front artisan and small retail activities



Enjoyment of Public Space

- All have the right to access and enjoy public space in complete freedom
- Participation is key, particularly when resources are scarce
- True enjoyment involves rights and duties
- Enjoyment as the best indicator of design and management success
- Use of public space for peaceful rallies and demonstration should not be restricted without reason
- Temporary uses are an integral part of public space enjoyment
- Enjoyment is strictly linked to responsible behavior
- Enjoyment is also linked to the ability to adapt and change

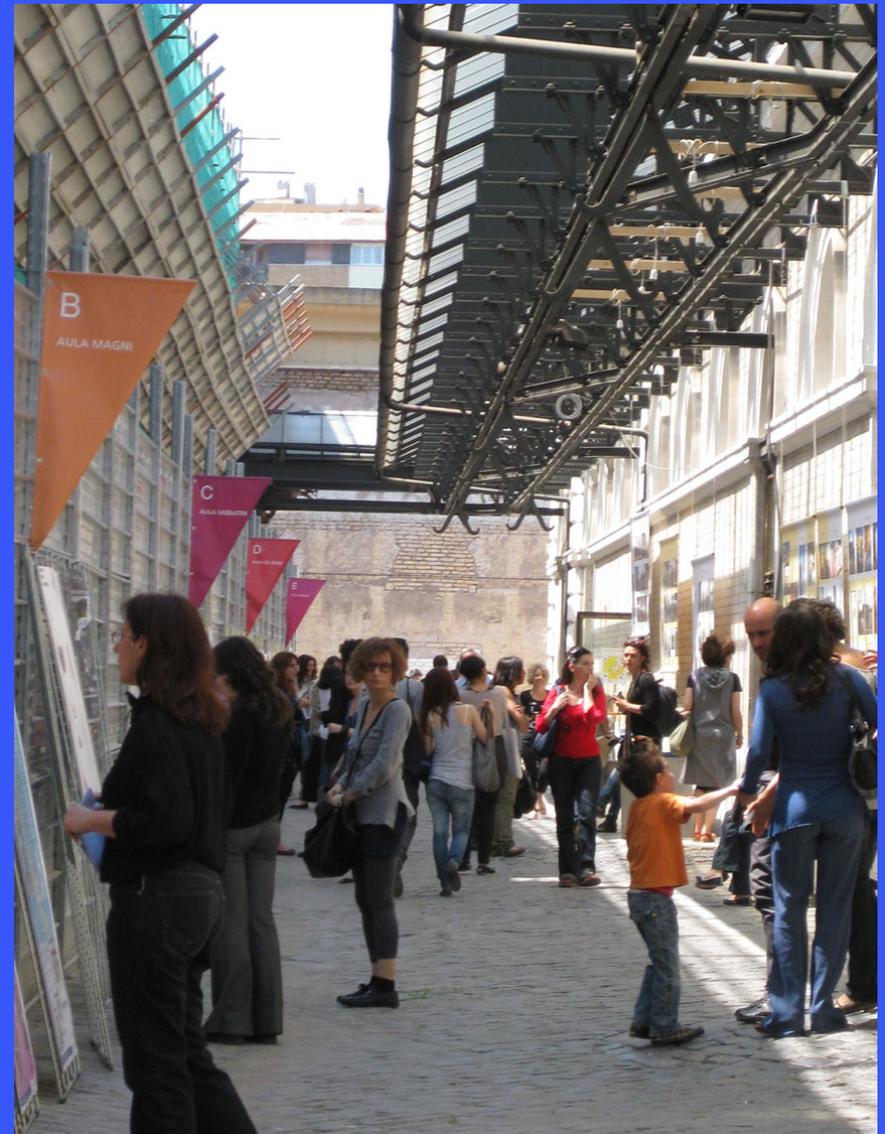


After the Charter

The Charter has been adopted by the City of Naples as an important foundation of its new public space policy.

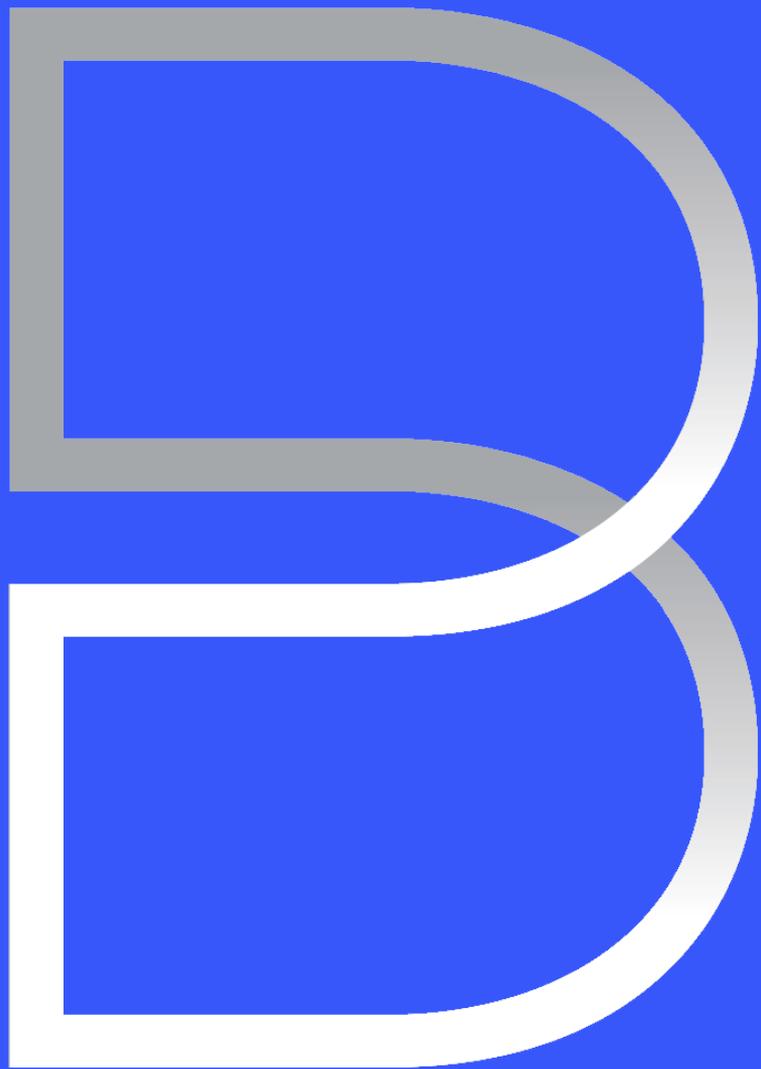
It has been presented at a number of international fora, including the VII World Urban forum in Medellin, the Future of Places Conferences in Stockholm and Buenos Aires, and the UN-Habitat Urban Thinkers Campus in Caserta, Italy.

A seven-language version (Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish) is being prepared for the May 2015 edition of the Biennial of Public Space.



“At the international level, the Biennial is considered an important step along the voyage that will generate and focus appropriate attention on the theme of public space in the “New Urban Agenda”, which the UN Conference will adopt. Consequently, adequate space shall be devoted to the means for conferring to the Charter, as well as other statements born since its adoption, an operational dimension. Therefore, this Biennial will conclude its work by adopting a concluding document that will constitute the “Biennial’s Message” to a broader national and international audience.”

From BiSP2015’s profile



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