



**Architecture and city. Learning from European Capitals of Culture**



Edited by: Thomas Bisiani, Sonia Prestamburgo and Adriano Venudo

What happens when culture becomes a tool to rethink the city? How can architecture, urban design and cultural policies converge to transform the city?

This volume explores forty years of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) Programme as a critical lens through which to read, design and imagine the contemporary city. Beyond celebratory narratives, the volume analyses ECoCs as complex devices of cultural diplomacy, civic imagination, participation and morpho-functional regeneration of urban space.

Through the investigation of 40 case studies, thematic essays and comparative mappings, the thesis of the "city as a cultural project" explores the possible combinations between architecture, temporary and ephemeral events and short, medium and long-term urban strategies, as a vector of new city paradigms. From Athens 1985 to Nova Gorica/Gorizia 2025, the book traces the evolution of the European Capitals of Culture from symbolic events to political and structural projects for the city.

The volume is the result of the study and design activity carried out within the RRR Lab - Integrated Design Studio of Architecture and Building in the academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25, thanks to the work of the student Collectives COLGO! and VAGO, the teachers of the Laboratory and the partners who in these two years have accompanied and supported the teaching and research activities carried out. Written by architects, scholars and designers involved in these paths, between local and global, the book proposes an interdisciplinary approach, which claims the city as a space of collective authorship, as a field of experimentation for the future of Europe and its communities.



## Architecture and city. Learning from European Capitals of Culture



Edited by: Thomas Bisiani, Sonia Prestamburgo and Adriano Venudo

## Architecture and city. Learning from European Capitals of Culture

Edited by: Thomas Bisiani, Sonia Prestamburgo and Adriano Venudo

Contributors:

COLGO! Collective, VAGO Collective

Giuseppina Scavuzzo, Chiara Gatta, Giulia Bonn,

Valentina Cechet, Eleuterio Proia

Luigi Di Dato, Alessio Bortot, Giulia Piccinin, Mariacristina D'Oria,

Michela Lupieri, Elisabetta Nascig, Marta Grimolizzi, Maria Elena Buslacchi.



EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste ©

Piazzale Europa 1 - 34127 Trieste

[www.eut.units.it](http://www.eut.units.it)

Copyright 2025

EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, Trieste 2025

Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International

Legal code: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.en>

ISBN 978-88-5511-621-3

E-ISBN 978-88-5511-622-0

Link to the digital edition, repository OpenStarTS:

<https://www.openstarts.units.it/handle/10077/37285>

Graphic design, layout, and editing: Marta Grimolizzi

Cover image: Vittoria Umani



This book is the result of a didactic and research journey developed by the RRR Lab - Integrated Design Studio for Architecture and the Built Environment at the University of Trieste.

Over the past two academic years (2023 - 25), the Design Studio has systematically explored the urban and architectural impact of the European Capitals of Culture, initiating collective design experiences through two student groups - COLGO! Collective and VAGO Collective - and involving numerous faculty members, researchers, teachers, and institutional partners.

The volume brings together contributions from both teaching and research: comparative analyses, critical essays, thematic maps, and case studies. It represents the first organic attempt to systematize the urban projects generated by the ECoC programme over the past forty years.

Edited by Thomas Bisiani, Sonia Prestamburgo, and Adriano Venudo, with contributions from faculty and researchers affiliated with the RRR Lab (Alessio Bortot, Luigi Di Dato, Michela Lupieri, Giulia Piccinin) at the Department of Engineering and Architecture, the book documents an experimental teaching experience and, at the same time, a research project developed in dialogue with institutions, territories, and communities involved in the GO!2025 Nova Gorica - Gorizia European Capital of Culture initiative.

The **COLGO! Collective** is composed of the following students from the Integrated Design Studio for Architecture and the Built Environment RRR Lab, academic year 2023 - 2024:

Simone Biasiol, Victoria Boljesic, Sara Cantarutti, Giulia Ceciliot, Alessandro De Cesaris, Valentina Esposito, Alessia Giacomini, Marta Grimolizzi, Yana Kalynovych, Isabella Leiter, Martin Predan, Matilda Sain, Davide Stefani, Raffaella Terracciano, Ivan Vinciguerra, Sara Zuppin.

The **VAGO Collective** is composed of the following students from the Integrated Design Studio for Architecture and the Built Environment RRR Lab, academic year 2024 - 2025:

Giada Allegretto, Emmanuel Battista Delgado, Nicoletta Bellotto, Pietro Calligaro, Giulia Cettul, Vedran Cvetkovič, Elisabetta De Luca, Enrico Del Favero, Niccolò Fabbro, Camilla Favretto, Giulia Ferrante, Greta Fragomeni, Egnis Guni, Anna Krajnik, Stivi Kruja, Vittoria Montanino, Federico Pinto, Massimo Radovic, Pietro Raimo, Chiara Scarel, Caterina Scoch, Anna Sforza, Veronika Sosič, Samuele Torresin.

The contents of this book are one of the outcomes of the teaching and research activity carried out within the Institutional agreement RRR Lab 2022-25 between the Department of Engineering and Architecture (University of Trieste), the Municipality of Gorizia, the EGTC-EZTS, the ATER of Gorizia, and the CONSUNIGO.



# INDEX

## 0

---

### Introduction

- 8 Forty years. Just a blink or something more?  
Learning from... ECoC  
Thomas Bisiani, Sonia Prestamburgo,  
Adriano Venudo

## 1

---

### Partners and observers

- 16 From object to process:  
Rethinking architecture  
through European Capitals of Culture  
Giuseppina Scavuzzo
- 17 Urban Center: a vision  
for Nova Gorica and Gorizia  
Chiara Gatta
- 18 Ephemeral, temporary, intangible.  
Giulia Bonn
- 19 The role of professional Chamber  
of Architects for the culture  
and quality of the profession  
Valentina Cechet
- 20 Bridges of knowledge: engineering  
and STEM initiatives for Nova Gorica - Gorizia  
European Capital of Culture 2025  
Eleuterio Proia, Pietro Zandegiacomo Rizio

## 2

---

### Comparing ECoCs

- 24 From Athens 1985 to Nova Gorica - Gorizia 2025:  
a brief history of the European Capitals of Culture  
Thomas Bisiani, Sonia Prestamburgo,  
Adriano Venudo
- 34 Analogous capital.  
*Capriccio, collage* and remix  
as meta-techniques of continuity  
Thomas Bisiani
- 42 Pending between the reality of evaluation  
and the magic of dreams, analysis  
of assessment methodologies  
for European Capitals of Culture  
Sonia Prestamburgo
- 48 The city is culture!  
Blueprints and *strata*  
of the European *Ecumenopolis*  
Adriano Venudo
- 67 Case studies' map
- 69 European Capitals of Culture: 16 case studies
- 137 European Capitals of Culture: 24 case studies

## 3

---

### Thematic insights

- 238 Divided cities, shared futures:  
Nova Gorica and Gorizia  
Claudio Meninno
- 242 Light design for urban events  
Alessio Bortot and Giulia Piccinin
- 246 A very tiny metropolis.  
Consideration in the shape  
of a conversation with Luigi Di Dato  
about Gorizia, GO!2025  
and the architecture of the future  
Thomas Bisiani and Adriano Venudo
- 260 The role of art as a catalyst  
for socio-cultural transformation  
Michela Lupieri
- 264 Grafting. Back to the future:  
the event as an agency of envisioning  
and anticipating the city of tomorrow  
Mariacristina D'Oría
- 268 Living the European Capitals of Culture:  
welcome village  
Elisabetta Nascig
- 272 Culture as a tool for urban regeneration:  
social equity in European Capitals of Culture  
Marta Grimolizzi
- 280 Reimagining Europe through culture:  
the legacy and prospects  
of the ECoC programme at a crossroads  
Maria Elena Buslacchi

## 4

---

### Summary reflections

- 286 The European Capitals of Culture:  
figures, strategies and trends  
Thomas Bisiani, Sonia Prestamburgo,  
Adriano Venudo
- 310 Learning from ECoC.  
Towards a handbook of good practices  
for European Capitals of Culture  
Thomas Bisiani, Sonia Prestamburgo,  
Adriano Venudo

## 5

---

### Apparatus

- 320 Sources
- 336 Critical bibliography on ECoC
- 342 Acknowledgements

# The city is culture!

## Blueprints and *strata* of the European *Ecumenopolis*

Adriano Venudo

The European City stands as the blueprint for a future *Ecumenopolis*, where culture shapes every brick and every street, crafting an urban landscape of shared identity.

The European city arises in parallel with the very idea of Europe, and in many respects contributes actively to its formation. From its inception, urbanity has constituted one of the fundamental rationales for the existence of Europe as a historically autonomous and culturally distinct entity. Throughout all phases of its development, European urbanism has accompanied, shaped, and often prefigured the broader trajectories of continental civilization. Its influence extends well beyond the territorial confines of Europe, leaving a persistent imprint on urban models in other parts of the world – from the colonial and post-colonial Americas in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries to the contemporary urban imaginaries of Asia. The study of European cities is, therefore, inseparable from a critical historiography of Europe itself. Since the third millennium BCE, the urban settlement has functioned as a device for the intensification of temporality through the spatialization of density. As Leonardo Benevolo observed, «the city enables the passage from prehistory to history, imposing a new rhythm on human affairs»<sup>1</sup> In catalyzing transformation, the city simultaneously inscribes itself within the *longue durée* of history. Its spatial and formal structures persist across generational transitions, transmitting built landscapes that condition future modes of living and collective organization.

The city thus operates as a dual temporal apparatus: it is both a projective engine of futurity and a material archive of the past. Within its fabric, the tension between innovation and permanence, between historical discontinuity and morphological continuity, is rendered spatially manifest.

In the current European context, the city continues to serve as the primary medium through which collective memory

acquires spatial form and symbolic coherence. Even within the framework of digitally mediated societies – where physical proximity has been ostensibly marginalized – the urban condition remains a critical vector for the articulation of both individual and collective identities.

European cities, through their diachronic stratification and architectural palimpsests, embody systems of value that are transmissible only through the permanence of concrete places. The historic center, in particular – often more resistant to the dynamics of transformation than the urban periphery – has emerged as a privileged site of shared memory and cultural continuity, echoing Baudelaire's poetic lament for the vanishing visage of old Paris.

«Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville  
Change plus vite, hélas, que le coeur d'un mortel)[...]

Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie

N'a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs

Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie

Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs»<sup>2</sup>.

The urban history of Europe constitutes a mosaic of singular instances, each intrinsically conditioned by geographical, political, economic, and – above all – cultural determinants. Every city presents itself as an autonomous world, a singularity within the continuum of European civilization, and all have been subjected to profound and extensive scholarly scrutiny.

Today, the sheer heterogeneity and depth of the urban corpus renders any attempt at systematic formalization illusory: it may be feasible to archive this wealth within the neutral abstraction of a database, yet it remains impossible to subsume it under a single model. The few extant synthetic studies available as of 2025 predominantly concern the medieval city. Synthetic accounts of the modern and contemporary city are even more exceptional, and comparative investigations between European and extra-European urbanities are rarer still.

In this context, might the phenomenon of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) offer a viable heuristic – a pro-



visional “criterion” – to initiate a tentative modelling of the European urban phenomenon?

It is within this speculative horizon that we propose to regard the ECoC as a novel epistemic opportunity: a privileged lens through which to formulate an inaugural, comprehensive reflection upon that extraordinary phenomenon, that common heritage which we collectively inhabit – the European city.

The European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) articulate a cultural phenomenon whose significance transcends the temporality of annual designation. They inscribe within the European space a new geography: a reticular constellation where historical stratification, urban innovation, and intercultural dialogue intersect to engender a unique model of urbanity, rooted in the *long durée* of European urban culture.

This emergent model, fundamentally cultural in nature, unfolds along two principal axes:

1. An immaterial dimension, articulating the dialectic between ephemerality and permanence – between the anticipatory temporality of the five years preceding the event (expectation and construction), the performative moment of the event itself (the event as event), and the sedimentation of what endures beyond (the legacy).
2. A material and physical dimension, linked to the concept of “stratification,” which, in its infinite modalities, characterizes the European city’s urbanity. This stratification may be apprehended along three interpretative vectors:
  - 2.1 As a morphological and physical palimpsest, wherein the city appears as a complex, layered organism;
  - 2.2 As a historical dynamic, a testimonial of temporal sedimentation – the “archaeological time” theorized by Michel Foucault in *Le parole e le cose. Un’archeologia delle scienze umane*<sup>3</sup>;
  - 2.3 As a process of “mixture,” often contingent yet at times deliberately orchestrated: a project of integration, superposition, and juxtaposition of disparate fabrics, monuments, spaces, and architectures.

These two aspects – perhaps among the first and most evident – emerge, through a disciplinary reading strictly internal to architecture and urban design, as some of the most significant and decisive factors in delineating a new geography of Europe: the geography of the ECoC. An image of Europe that, as in the medieval era, is composed of a constellation of many small cities, of relationships among a multitude of medium-sized, minor, and profoundly distinctive urban centers. A Europe which, through this possible “reading through the ECoC” may be interpreted as a single city: a sort of cultural *ecumenopolis*, an *ecumenopolis* composed of 65 European Capitals of Culture.

### **A stratified model of urbanity**

In *Une vie de cité*, Marcel Poëte, while investigating the origins of European urban history, observed that the spirit of the European city lies precisely in the layering of fabrics, monuments, fragments, surfaces, streets, squares, and signs. These signs, bearing memory and meaning, construct urbanity itself through processes of superimposition, juxtaposition, and temporal testimony. Although Poëte wrote primarily about Paris, his reading can be extended across continental and Mediterranean Europe – a cultural landscape profoundly different from others. Indeed, in Asian urbanism, the notion of stratification carries a different, often diminished, significance; while in American cities, shaped by the legacy of the «Oregon Trail syndrome»<sup>4</sup>, stratification as understood in the European tradition is almost absent. Tracing a lineage from Marcel Poëte to Benedetto Gravagnuolo, from Pierre Lavedan<sup>5</sup> to Leonardo Benevolo<sup>6</sup>, and from Henri Pirenne to Francesco Tentori – through the literary landscapes of Balzac, Baudelaire, Yourcenar, Proust, Sartre, Calvino, Kavafis, and Rilke – we encounter a European urban cultural heritage so dense, intricate, and rich that, as Leonardo Benevolo emphasized, it remains ultimately “immeasurable”. It is a phenomenon that can perhaps only be grasped through a “bird’s-eye view,” revealing its unity and its ecumenical character, yet resisting systematization, categorization, or scientific codification: a cultural dimension built up through millennia of layered existence.

The cited authors depict a Europe of cities – an urban continent experienced through journeys within and between urban spaces. The act of traveling from one city to another, through

the *Petit Tour* and the *Grand Tour*, reveals a recurring and recognizable urban form: the European city, distinct yet interconnected. Through these movements, geography becomes a lens: allowing us to perceive a recurring urban image, to sketch an anatomy of European urbanity. This movement across cities draws us into a nebulous mass – a shared “space” that is simultaneously physical, mental, and cultural. This nebulous mass, at once semantic and material, continues to expand, nurturing itself and forging what we may call a “common and singular culture”: the culture of urbanity. Just as culture itself is the immaterial, layered archive of human knowledge, so cities represent its material, tangible, and morphological counterpart.

Unlike the American or Asian urban paradigms – characterized by homogeneous planning and metropolitan expansions driven predominantly by economic and technological imperatives – European cities are the product of millennia of stratified evolution. As Lewis Mumford observed in *The City in History*<sup>7</sup>, European cities are custodians of a culture and knowledge sedimented through time, resulting in an urban fabric densely layered with memory. In this context, architecture is not merely a matter of functionality; it becomes a language capable of narrating centuries-old stories and expressing profound cultural identities.

The European city distinguishes itself through a stratified complexity that constitutes the very core of its identity: a historical palimpsest upon which centuries of transformations and memories are layered. This stratification, as Pierre Lavedan emphasized regarding the medieval origins common to European cities, is not simply an archival record of the past, but a living material. When we apply this interpretative lens to the phenomenon of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC), it becomes clear that stratification forms the primary substrate of the entire ECoC cultural intervention. Each layer – from the Roman period to post-industrial transformations – serves as a fundamental building block, weaving an urban fabric wherein the ephemeral nature of the event is integrated into a durable continuum of regeneration.

The historian and scholar of the European city, Edith Ennen, emphasizes in her *History of the Medieval City* that the stratification

of European cities «offers a rich and polyphonic context, where anything may happen, yet always according to an underlying orientation” – a set of unwritten, shared rules that create a kind of overarching, invisible framework»<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, Françoise Choay, in *The Rule and the Model*<sup>9</sup>, describes a comparable self-generating urban mechanism typical of European cities. Supporting this view, as early as the late Eighteenth century, Adam Smith had observed the presence of the so-called “invisible hand” in the origins and development of the European city. Just as the European city grows, layer upon layer, through the “provisional” – or rather, the transitional – which becomes enduring trace, likewise, the ephemeral nature of the cultural events of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) acts as a catalyst for ongoing and “oriented” renewal processes. The ECoC do not erase this stratification; rather, they amplify it, transforming the historical complexity – matrix of the European city – into a resource for urban innovation. The interventions realized on the occasion of these events – be they exhibitions, installations, or the redevelopment of buildings and public spaces – draw from this multiplicity of layers, endowing each city with a unique identity deeply rooted in its history.

Benedetto Gravagnuolo<sup>10</sup>, in one of his later works, underscored that any intervention on the contemporary European city must necessarily take into account the “dimension of stratification as a paradigmatic condition of urban design,” because, regardless of whether transformations succeed or not, their cultural impact is invariably positive. Similarly, and precisely according to the principle identified by Gravagnuolo, the ECoC are founded upon these “urban layers,” consistently transforming historical heritage into a contemporary narrative that reinforces a sense of belonging and fosters social cohesion. According to this model, urban stratification becomes the common denominator linking the cities of the continent, setting them apart from American or Asian models, where more often a homogeneous and less layered urban structure prevails. The richness of Europe’s “thousand diversities”, as Marcel Poëte described it, is not merely a relic of the past; it remains the foundation for new relational configurations. In the case of the ECoC experience, it becomes a potential for dialogue across epochs, translating directly into innovation and urban regeneration.

The ability of European cities to blend the old with the new – without renouncing the complexity of their past – enables the ECoCs to enhance each urban center as a dynamic laboratory. In this scenario, stratification becomes the fulcrum around which cultural intervention is organized, weaving a network of relations that transcends national boundaries. Pierre Lavedan and Edith Ennen have both demonstrated in their studies how stratification allows cities to adapt and renew themselves, while maintaining a living connection to their historical memory. This approach – integrating ancient and modern elements – defines a highly oriented model of urbanity, perfectly aligned with the concept of the “city-Europe” that emerges from the collective scholarship of these “founding fathers” (Lavedan, Poete, Pirenne, Benevolo, Gravagnuolo, Rykwert).

In sum, stratification – understood as the accumulation and layering of historical *strata* – emerges as one of the most important values of the ECoC initiative. It not only unites European cities in a continuous dialogue, but also constitutes the foundation for a new “cultural geography” of the continent. The ECoC leverage this layered richness to transform the network of cities into an *ecumenopolis*, where past and present interweave into an interconnected web that defines the evolving face of Europe. This model of urbanity – stratified, memory-driven, and oriented toward transformation – is the engine powering urban regeneration and the construction of a collective identity, rendering European culture a shared and perpetually renewed heritage.

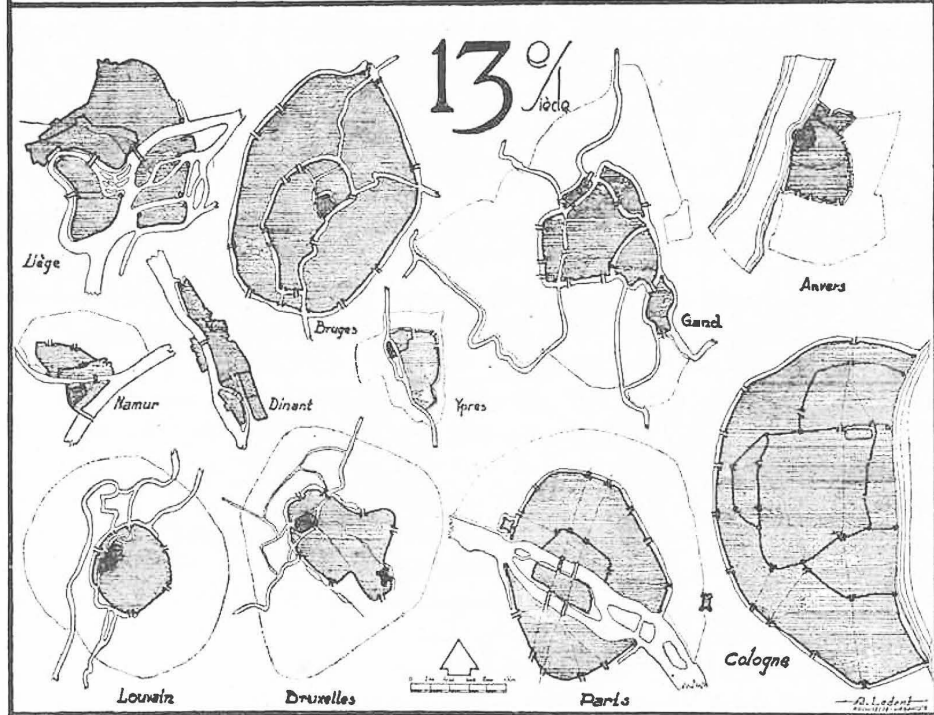
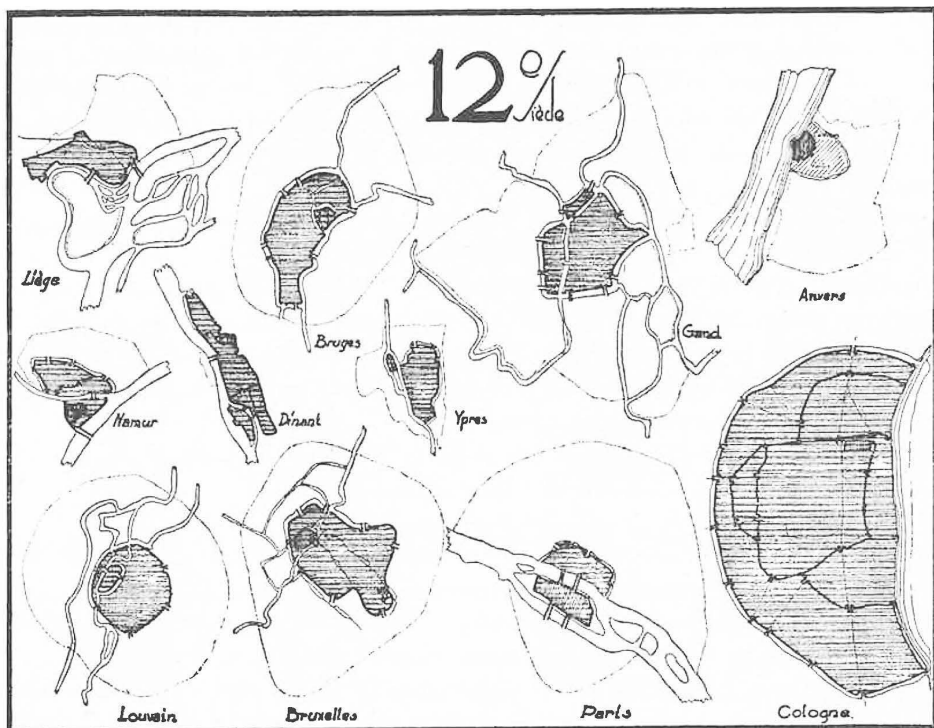
### **The urban inventions of the European-city: public spatiality, urban scene, and morphologies of inhabitation**

The urban inventions of Europe form a profound and stratified grammar, shaping collective space as both a cultural and political artifact. Through the continuous reimagining of squares, walls, blocks, and courtyards, the European city reveals a singular ability to articulate space as both context and project, as a site of representation and coexistence, of memory and innovation. In an era marked by global transformations, the rediscovery of these forms offers an essential foundation for rethinking the contemporary city. The definition of urban boundaries – from medieval walls to the grand boulevards of

the Nineteenth century – is not merely a vestige of the past; it remains one of the most potent keys for interpreting the European city as an intentionally constructed and politically resonant space. By setting boundaries, the city affirms its will to exist, to distinguish itself, and to self-represent. Yet in its openings – its gates, passages, and thresholds to the surrounding landscape – it displays a simultaneous capacity for dialogue and transformation. Thus, the European city appears as a complex and layered system of signs, limits, figures, and memories, continually nourishing the development of an extraordinarily rich language through which collective space can be conceived and expressed as a true form of civilization. Throughout history, the European city has stood out for the richness and variety of its “urban inventions” – the spatial and architectural forms that have given shape to communal life, to urban culture, and to the very idea of citizenship. From the *forum* to the *agorà*, from the *boulevard* to the courtyard, each device is the result of historical stratification, blending functions, symbols, and memories. Far from being relics, these inventions remain vital tools in the contemporary project of the city, capable of fostering new forms of cohesion, participation, and inhabitation. Through its dense weave of signs and relational structures, the European city continues to offer a profound grammar for imagining urban space as a political, cultural, and symbolic field.

### **Public space: community place**

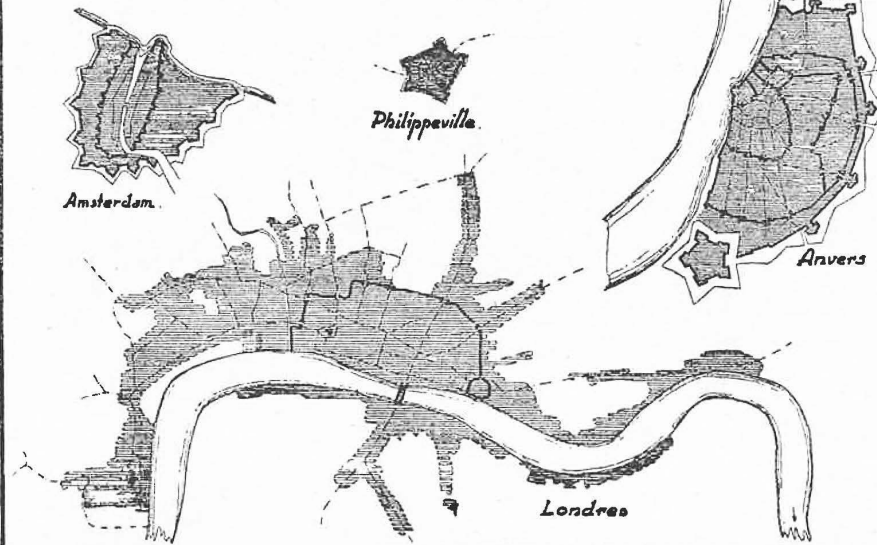
The European city has historically been constituted as a civic machine, built upon the centrality of public space as a place of collective visibility, exchange, and representation. Since antiquity, European urban culture has produced spatial inventions that embody the idea of an active and present citizenry. The Greek *agorà* represents the original matrix: an open, multifunctional space, the center of the social, political, and commercial life of the *polis*, where the citizen exercised his belonging not only symbolically but also practically. This model was monumentalized in the Roman world with the *forum*, which became the juridical, administrative, and religious epicenter of the imperial city: a complex spatial device, axial and organized, surrounded by basilicas, temples, and porticoes. During the Middle Ages and then into the modern era,



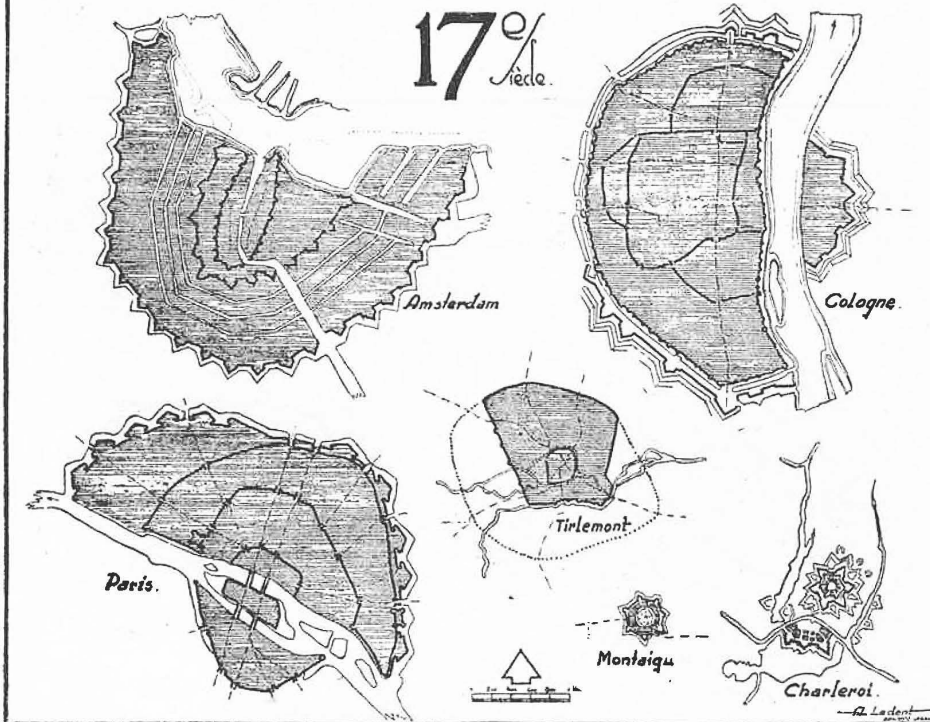
12: Outlines of the structure and historical-urban evolution of the "cities of Europe".

Source: P. Levedan, *Urbanisme et Architecture*, Paris, Henri Laurens Editeur, 1954.

16<sup>e</sup> siècle.



17<sup>e</sup> siècle.



the form of the piazza emerged, taking on various expressions depending on context: religious (the cathedral square), civic (the town hall square), or commercial (the market square). The European piazza thus became the urban space par excellence, the public stage of the community and a mirror of its social and cultural stratification. Structures such as the *arengario* – the civic architecture typical of Italian communal cities – served as architectural-political devices for public speech, suspended between interior and exterior, between building and square. The market space, in contrast, preserved a more everyday and fluid dimension, often constituting the economic and spontaneous heart of the city. All these spatial inventions express a deep continuity: they are not merely containers for activities, but cultural devices that define the city as a civic, active, and participatory body. The European city is born and continuously reshaped around places where the public expresses itself, engages, and represents its collective identity.

### **Urban scene and delimitation devices as instruments of collective identity**

Alongside its central public spaces, the European city is characterized by the construction of scenic and infrastructural devices that articulate and delimit its space. Urban walls represent the first major invention in this regard: not merely military defenses, but symbolic boundaries between civilization and nature, between inside and outside. They distinguish the space of the city from the countryside, shaping not only its physical form but also its spatial and mental model. The walls are thus an integral part of the European “urban invention”: they outline the city as a finite, legible, and defensible body – a separated and distinct place, yet one that remains in dialogue with the outside world through its gates and roads. The *centa*, the medieval walled city, becomes a symbol of cohesion and autonomy. It is a compact perimeter, often circular or polygonal, that encloses within it the community, production, and dwelling, establishing a clear symbolic fracture between the interior and exterior. Urban gates turn into ceremonial spaces, thresholds of passage and representation. In the Nineteenth century, Haussmann’s transformations introduced the *boulevard*: both an urban infrastructure and a monu-

mental public space representing urban identity. The *boulevard* functions simultaneously as a mobility infrastructure and a social showcase, the place of bourgeois strolling and *flânerie*. The era of the *Ringstraßen* transforms former defensive systems into integrated urban devices, combining parks, monumental architectures, and mobility. These *rings* replace medieval walls, turning road systems into scenic structures that weave together public functions, institutions, and green spaces, generating a “city within the city.” The continuous building frontage defines the face of the compact city, enclosing public space as a “constructed void,” where architecture does not stand alone but actively participates in the construction of the urban form. Urban delimitation is thus an essential component of the European city: through walls, gates, and paths, not only is a physical perimeter created, but also a collective identity.

### **Typologies, morphologies, and forms of “European Collective Living”**

The European city has developed through a series of morphological and typological elements that structure urban space, shaping living as a collective phenomenon. The block is the fundamental unit of the compact city: it can take on many variants (closed, open, traversable) and is expressed in different models – from the Barcelona, Italian, or Parisian block to the Berlin or Viennese urban fabric – but it always maintains its character as a relational urban module, balancing private and public space. The building block (block-type) constitutes its typological concretization, while the courtyard – located within the block or building – represents a semi-private space that can take on various meanings: from a place of collective work to a garden, from a passageway to the heart of daily life. The urban courtyard, in particular, stands out as one of the most versatile forms of the European city: it can be found in the Mediterranean patio house, the Viennese *Wohnhöfe*, and the French *cloître*, always acting as a spatial device capable of combining intimacy, community, and environmental quality. The courtyard represents one of the most well-known and widespread “inventions” of the European city, appearing in countless variations across continental and Mediterranean Europe, and is used for both productive and residential spaces. It evolves into Mediterranean, monastic, and bourgeois models. The urban

courtyard thus becomes a semi-public space capable of ensuring environmental quality and social cohesion. The façade (*quinta*), finally, defines the boundary and the scene, acting as an ordering element of the city: not merely a façade, but an integral part of the construction of shared urban space. These “morpho-typologies” express the historical and social density of the European city, founded on a distinctive and ever-recognizable balance between individual, community, and memory.

### **Urban culture as a European constitutional principle**

The idea of urban culture can be considered a constituent element – if not formally, then at least substantially – of the European Constitution. We might even suggest that urban culture is an implicit element of the European Constitution<sup>11</sup>. The city, after all, is the original site of politics, public space, and collective identity: Europe was born and developed as a civilization of cities. In this sense, urban culture represents a shared code, a set of spatial, social, and institutional practices that spans European history and shapes its political horizon. From the Greco-Roman world to medieval cities, from the Renaissance to bourgeois revolutions, the European city has always been the space of freedom, commerce, self-government, and culture. The deepest archetype is the Greek *polis*, where urban and political space coincided for the first time. Particularly, the reform of Cleisthenes (508 BC) in Athens introduced the circular assembly (*ekklesia*), a spatial and institutional symbol of a new model of participation: the circular form reflects the equality of citizens, all equally distant from the center of speech and decision-making. This model – in which the architecture of the city mirrors the architecture of democracy – profoundly influenced the evolution of political thought and the shape of European cities.

Within the framework of European treaties, especially the Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>12</sup> and the promotion of territorial cohesion, implicit references emerge to the city as a space of rights, dignity, and inclusion. Today, European policies for smart, sustainable, and resilient cities increasingly recognize the political role of urban form: the city acts as a space of mediation between local and global, between national sovereignty and European citizenship. The tradition of the *polis*, as a place of common action and public deliberation, resonates today in the participatory demands of urban

planning processes and in the renewed value placed on civic space. European urban space has consolidated around some recognizable constants: the centrality of public space, the mixture of functions, the human scale of settlements, and the relationship with the landscape. European urban policies (such as the EU Urban Agenda, active for over 30 years now) promote these values, encouraging inclusive, sustainable, and compact urban models, opposing sprawl and segregation. The legacy of the *polis* – as an integrated structure of relationships among buildings, public spaces, and institutions – is still visible in the urban morphology of Europe, a city shaped through historical processes whose emblem is stratification itself. For centuries, European architecture has been a common cultural discourse, composed of styles, typologies, techniques, and symbols that have spread and adapted across local contexts. Historic European cities share a formal and symbolic matrix that expresses shared values: squares, markets, cathedrals, town halls, walls, and boulevards. This heritage, now recognized and protected by European institutions, is an integral part of Europe’s common identity. The idea of the city as a collective and symbolic construction, inherited from the *polis*, continues to resonate in contemporary urban design. Introducing urban culture as a principle in the European constitution would mean recognizing the value of the city as a space of citizenship, memory, innovation, and cohesion. It would also promote a development model based on the quality of urban space, territorial equity, and sustainability. The assembly of Cleisthenes, with its open and horizontal form, reminds us that the architecture of institutions is inseparable from the form of space: only a just city can host a just democracy.

In a Europe moving toward political and cultural integration, urban culture can be envisioned as an ordering principle of European identity. It embodies the nexus between space, rights, and democracy, and can provide a solid foundation for a new European humanism based on conscious territorial planning and on the centrality of the city as a common good. In this perspective, the initiative of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) takes on strategic value: not just a celebration of creativity or cultural diversity, but a true symbolic and spatial policy of the European Union, capable of giving visibility and centrality to the city as a laboratory of European citizen-

ship. Every European city is, in itself, a living stratification: a palimpsest of architectures, signs, memories, cultures, toponyms, and languages reflecting the encounter – often conflictual, always coexistent – between peoples, eras, and worldviews. European cities are not mere containers, but complex cultural organisms, spatial outcomes of profound, political, and symbolic historical processes.

Some examples illustrate this clearly: Matera (ECoC 2019), with its stratification of prehistoric caves, rock-cut architectures, Baroque churches, and modern urbanism, transformed a marginalized past into a European narrative of resilience and regeneration. Marseille (ECoC 2013), a Mediterranean crossroads and frontier city, staged the complexity of plural identities and the challenge of urban inclusion. Plovdiv (ECoC 2019), the oldest continuously inhabited city in Europe, told the story of encounters among empires and cultures as the foundation for coexistence. Esch-sur-Alzette (2022), meanwhile, exemplified post-industrial regeneration by merging the memory of labor with cultural innovation.

The ECoCs activate and stage this urban stratification, transforming the city into a theater of multiple narratives, where memory is not mere preservation but a living material for design and shared identity. It is precisely in the stratified city, with its ability to hold together past and future, that the deepest potential of European integration manifests: the ability to build cohesion without erasing difference, to develop a common culture starting from the plurality of places, *topos*, languages, and ways of life.

Through the European Capitals of Culture, urban culture becomes an agent of transformation, an opportunity to rewrite the pact between citizens and the city, between history and project. The ECoCs return to us the idea of the city as a contemporary *polis*, where democracy is measured by the quality of public space, the density of meaning, and participation in the construction of the future. For this reason, recognizing stratified urban culture among Europe's founding principles also means promoting an idea of active, conscious, and situated citizenship: a citizenship rooted in space and open to the world.

## **Possible model of urbanity as the foundation for the new European geography of the ECoC**

The historic European city presents itself as a stratified organism, where the superimposition of temporal layers – from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance up to modern transformations – represents the distinctive heritage of an entire continent. According to Pierre Lavedan<sup>13</sup>, urban stratification is not merely the deposit of traces from the past, but a dynamic element that constitutes the living material upon which the identity of every European city is built. This layered complexity, integrating memory, architecture, and social functions, forms, for us today, the indispensable foundation for understanding the phenomenon of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC). Edith Ennen<sup>14</sup> highlighted how the stratification of historic European cities creates a unique urban fabric, where each layer – visible or not – interacts with the others, forming a kind of palimpsest in which past and present are in constant dialogue. This ongoing dialogue underpins the approach of the ECoC: although characterized by the predominance of temporary events, they draw from the richness of urban stratification to promote urban regeneration projects that enhance historical heritage. In this sense, the ephemeral nature of the event becomes a catalyst for a renewal process that leaves a lasting imprint.

Benedetto Gravagnuolo<sup>15</sup> argues that stratification represents the common denominator among European cities, clearly distinguishing them from American and Asian urban models. Whereas Anglo-Saxon and many Asian contexts tend toward spatial homogenization and erasure of historical traces, in Europe stratification – with its “thousand diversities” – is a resource. It acts as a unifying element: every city, while maintaining its historical peculiarities, shares the capacity to transform its heritage into a driver for the regeneration of its cultural fabric, starting from urban renewal. Marcel Poëte<sup>16</sup> further elaborated this concept more than eighty years ago, emphasizing how urban stratification could offer a privileged field of action for European cities – an intuition that today finds concrete expression in the work of the ECoC. The cultural event, in fact, does not simply showcase the traces of the past; it uses them as the foundation for innovative projects that integrate historical heritage with con-



temporary needs. In this way, the ECoC serve as moments of renewal, transforming urban layers into platforms for dialogue and development, contributing to the definition of a new European geography. In this perspective, stratification is not merely a legacy of time but becomes the very fulcrum around which future cultural and urban relationships are built.

European cities are reconfigured as “laboratories of integration”, where the dialogue among different historical layers fosters a regenerative process that translates into a lasting legacy. This process is the foundation of the “new European geography” mapped by the ECoC, where the multiplicity of historical experiences is converted into an architectural and urban language capable of creating a connective tissue between cities. The network of European Capitals of Culture, by enhancing urban stratification, draws a map in which historic heritage becomes the fertile ground for new configurations of relationships.

The ECoC are not merely annual events; they are true catalysts that transform the historic city into a “city-Europe” – an *ecumenopolis* where local identities, while maintaining their specificity, are integrated into an interconnected network that shapes the face of an ever-evolving Europe.

Stratification, with its multiple facets, thus becomes the added value that unites European cities, endowing them with a cultural richness and a capacity for renewal that are rarely found in other global contexts.

### **Stratification in the millenary European urban culture: a multidimensional concept**

The concept of stratification, within the context of European urban culture, stands as one of the most powerful keys for understanding the evolution and complexity of the city – especially the European city<sup>17</sup>. According to Leonardo Benevolo, there are three fundamental principles that characterize the origin and development of the European city compared to others around the world, all rooted precisely in the accumulation of layers and in the «stratified»<sup>18</sup> coexistence of these three models. Stratification is not merely a physical or material phenomenon; it is a principle that permeates the European city in multiple ways, endowing its structures with a unique and unrepeatable character.

The urban culture of the European capitals, in particular – as we mentioned at the outset – develops through a plurality of interpretations of stratification, which manifest themselves across three main dimensions:

1. stratification as a complex organism: the city as a living system composed of intertwined temporal layers, where growth occurs by accumulation rather than replacement;
2. stratification as historical and archaeological testimony: the city as a palimpsest where every visible and invisible trace contributes to the collective memory and identity;
3. stratification as mixture or project of integration and overlapping: the city as an open project, where different epochs, styles, and cultures are not erased but interwoven, creating a dynamic and inclusive urban fabric.

### **Stratification as a complex organism**

The first interpretation of stratification concerns its physical and morphological dimension, where the city is understood as a complex organism – a system of layers that overlap, intersect, and continuously transform over time. Every urban element – whether a street, a building, a square, or a park – is never simply the result of a single phase of construction; rather, it emerges from a process of evolution, where new layers accumulate over pre-existing ones. European cities are places where urbanization has produced a discontinuous and stratified development across centuries. The traces of these transformations are clearly visible in the urban fabric, where ancient Roman walls stand beside Renaissance palaces, and modernist buildings coexist alongside contemporary structures. In this sense, physical stratification is the outcome of the cities’ continuous transformation, absorbing the passage of different epochs, each with its own succession of styles, technologies, and needs. This process creates a dense urban landscape, in which every layer, every building, every element bears witness to a historical phase and a previous way of life, while simultaneously participating in the living, evolving movement of the contemporary city.

### **Stratification as historical and archaeological testimony**

Another fundamental aspect of stratification is its historical and archaeological dimension. European cities are true his-

torical palimpsests, where each new act of construction or transformation never entirely erases the past. In this case, stratification becomes a testimony of time — a “material memory” preserving the traces of history. Each urban layer tells a story, from the founding of a city through its medieval development and onward to its modern transformations. Cities like Rome, London, Paris, and Berlin are paradigmatic examples of this kind of stratification, where archaeological discoveries continually reveal new insights into how past civilizations shaped the urban environment. This phenomenon does not only apply to the large European capitals, but also to the “thousand small cities” of the “old continent”. Historical ruptures; more often, it reflects the adaptation and continuous reinterpretation of urban spaces by successive generations. Ruins, Roman walls, Medieval churches, Renaissance squares, Baroque porticoes and exedras, Eighteenth century scenic perspectives, and Nineteenth century *boulevards* — all are fragments that tell a shared story, making the city a place of memory and reflection on the passage of time.

### **Stratification as a process of mixing, integration, and overlapping**

Finally, stratification in the European city can be interpreted as a dynamic process of mixing and overlapping different cultural, architectural, and social layers. In many cities, stratification is not simply a natural or inevitable occurrence, but a deliberate design choice that reflects the intention to integrate different elements, styles, and urban fabrics. This process of integration carries a strong cultural and social connotation and is often the result of policies of hospitality, multiculturalism, and adaptation to new needs. European cities are marked by a plurality of identities and cultures that have layered themselves over the centuries. In many metropolises, public spaces serve as meeting points for different social and cultural groups who live side by side, contributing to the creation of an urban fabric that is both stratified and expressive of a complex and diverse society. The integration of different architectural styles — such as Gothic, Baroque, Neoclassical, and Modern — and the coexistence of multiple urban functions (residential, commercial, industrial) are tangible examples of stratification as a project of blending.

Moreover, contemporary cities increasingly face the need to integrate new demands linked to globalization, technology, and social change. Stratification thus becomes a process of welcoming and adaptation, in which old and new elements overlap to create an urban identity in continuous evolution. This dynamic aspect of stratification — where the juxtaposition of different fabrics and functions results from a conscious project — gives cities a vibrant and ever-transforming character.

### **Multidimensionality as urban milieu**

Stratification, in all its complexity, represents one of the fundamental dimensions of European urban culture. It is not merely a question of material and physical layers accumulating over time, but a multidimensional concept that embraces historical memory, social dynamics, and the project of cultural integration. European cities bear witness to a continuous process of stratification, developing through the superimposition of epochs, styles, and cultures, creating spaces dense with material and meaning: what various authors<sup>19</sup> we have mentioned — the founding fathers of this European urban culture — define as *urban milieu*.

The city as a complex organism, as a historical palimpsest, and as a project of blending and integration stands as the highest expression of European urban culture, which finds in stratification its principle of continuity and innovation. The stratification of European cities, with their wealth of “historical sediments,” represents one of the most significant values of the ECoC program. A city’s ability to integrate and enhance its past, transforming it into an active element for urban regeneration and for the future, is the driving force behind the new European geography, helping to define the idea of a “city-Europe” — a model of *ecumenopolis* in which historical diversity becomes the starting point for a shared and innovative future.

### **The paradox of permanence and ephemerality**

The ECoC embody the tension between the “enduring” and the “temporary.” The cultural events organized during the year of designation as European Capital of Culture are, by their very nature, ephemeral: festivals, exhibitions, and performances that concentrate an intense cultural activity into a few months.

However, these events act as catalysts for urban regeneration processes that leave permanent traces in the urban landscape. As Kevin Lynch and Gordon Cullen<sup>20</sup> observed, many decades ago, the perception of urban space results from multiple layers of experience, where the interaction between historical memory and new transformations defines the identity of a place. Jane Jacobs, although focusing on the American context, offers a useful point of comparison: «while American cities often emerge from the vitality of neighborhoods and renewed social mobility, European cities are distinguished by the continuity of their heritage, where every alley and monument tells a past that integrates with the present»<sup>21</sup>. This particularity allows, in our case study of the ECoC, the transformation of the cultural event into a structuring element of the urban fabric, translating the temporary into a lasting impact.

### **Urban culture as a driver of a new geography**

The ECoC operate on cities as cultural vectors because cities are the fulcrum of social, economic, and artistic life. They represent laboratories where tradition and innovation coexist and engage in dialogue. The European approach to urban design, embracing the complexity of history and local identities, contrasts sharply with modern models that often tend toward the homogenization of spaces. As Peter Hall<sup>22</sup> emphasizes, the European city, over more than two thousand years of evolution, has managed to integrate respect for historical heritage with the need for innovation, creating spaces that are both custodians of memory and engines of renewal. In this context, architecture and urban planning become essential tools for expressing and consolidating a shared cultural identity. Initiatives such as the revitalization of historic centers, the creation of new cultural infrastructures, and the transformation of industrial areas into hubs of creativity not only improve the livability of cities but also strengthen their international reputation. Emblematic in this regard are the ECoC cases of Graz and Liverpool, respectively with the Kunsthhaus and the renewal of the Docks, where in both instances the temporary ECoC intervention left a significant and lasting mark on the urban landscape.

### **Conclusions. Towards the ECoC Europe *Ecumenopolis***

Living together, between *ecumene* and “*hermitage*”: this polarity, echoing an ancient yet ever-relevant tension, defines today

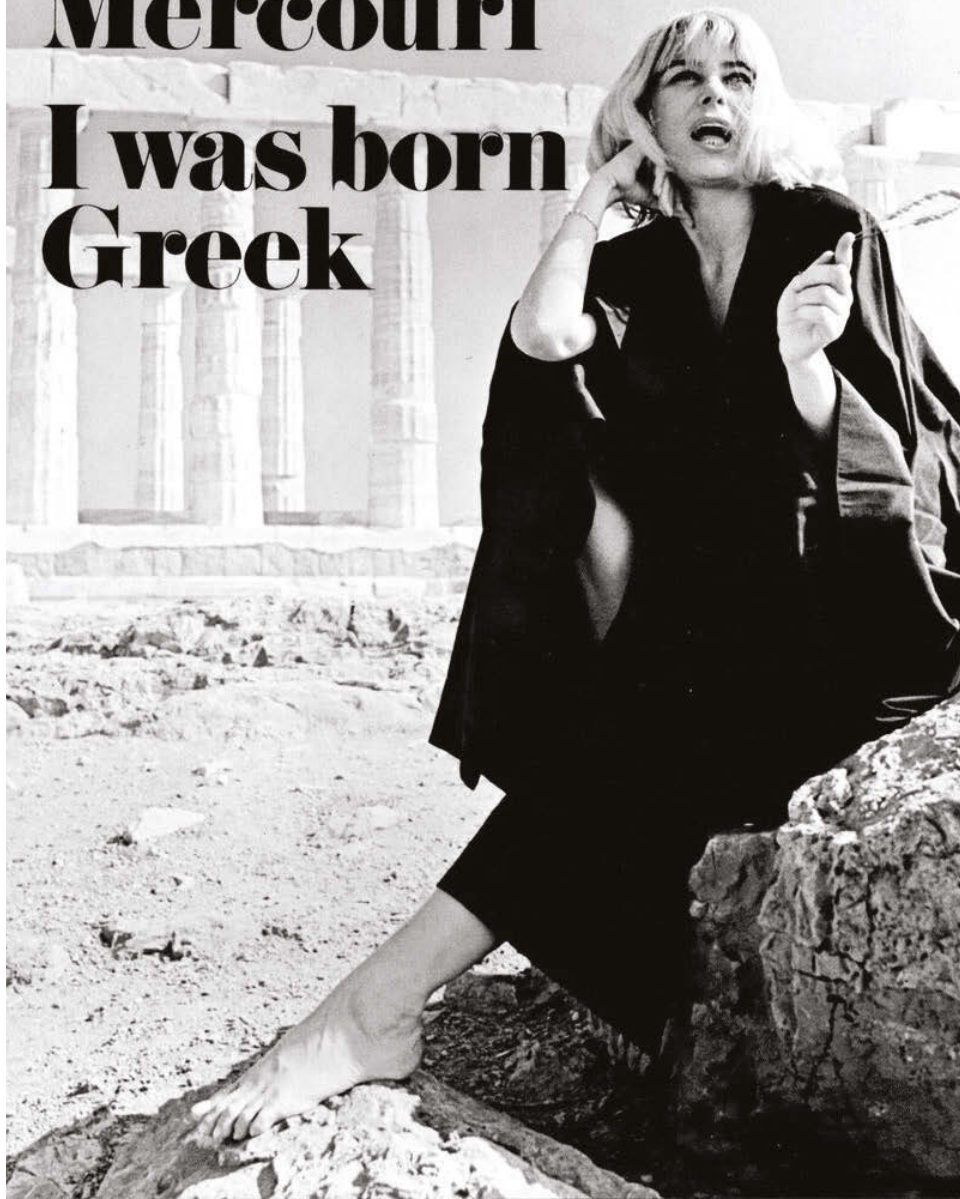
the critical ground upon which the future of urban Europe is being shaped. The hermitage – symbol of withdrawal, separation, and closed identities – can today be seen as a metaphor for isolationist tendencies and identity-driven closures that threaten to fragment the European space. In contrast, the *ecumene* represents the domain of shared life, openness, and encounter: a space where differences do not vanish but instead meet, transform, and amplify into new forms of coexistence. It is precisely along this trajectory that the genealogy of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) unfolds. Born in 1985 from the initiative of Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri, the ECoC project was conceived in an era when Europe was neither politically nor monetarily united. The idea was to build an imagined community through culture, and more specifically, through cities. It was no coincidence that the first field of European unification was not the state or the economy, but urban culture itself. The city was recognized as both the smallest and the greatest unit of meaning – the place where European history stratifies and renews itself, and where a new form of European citizenship, prior even to institutional frameworks, could be born: a cultural citizenship. Since then, the ECoC have transformed culture from a mere symbolic ornament into a true device for urban regeneration, reinforcing the idea of the city as a “laboratory for Europe’s future”. Following the lesson of Henri Lefebvre<sup>23</sup>, this process can be read as a “form of spatial production”: cities are not merely the backdrop of culture; they are its active body – the spaces where narratives, identities, and collective visions are continually forged.

The proposal of the *ecumenopolis*, in this sense, is not a utopian fantasy but a theoretical and operative figure. Reworking Constantinos Doxiadis<sup>24</sup> original vision of a “global techno system metropolis”, we can now propose a cultural variant: a City-Europe, composed of urban nodes interconnected through networks of memory, culture, and project. Not an indistinct *megalopolis*, nor a simple sum of isolated cities, but a complex, reticular, and polycentric urban system, where each city contributes to a collective construction of meaning and future.

Kenneth Frampton<sup>25</sup> reminds us that European modernity has never equated with uniformity but rather with a plurality of critical traditions – rooted in local contexts yet capable of

# Melina Mercouri

## I was born Greek



On this page: Melina Mercouri.

On the facing page:

1: Adam Smith;

2: Leonardo Benevolo;

3: Françoise Choay;

4: Edith Ennen;

5: Benedetto Gravagnuolo;

6: Pierre Lavedan;

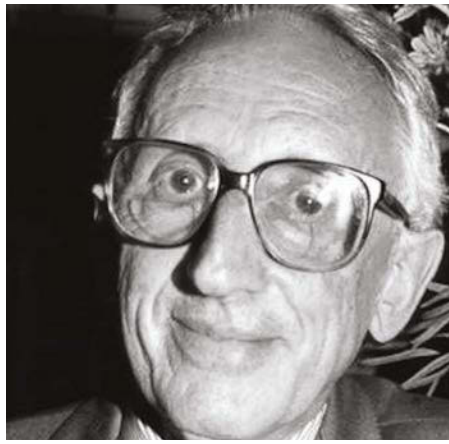
7: Henri Pirenne;

8: Marcel Poëte;

9: Joseph Rykwert.



1



2



3



4



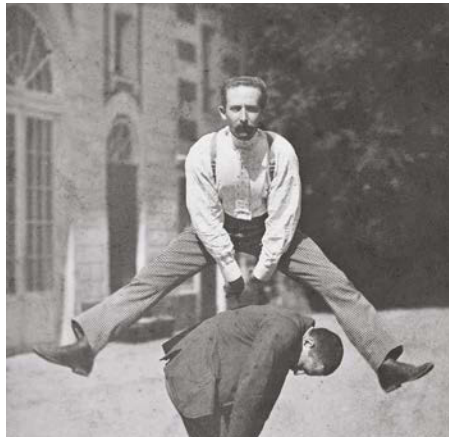
5



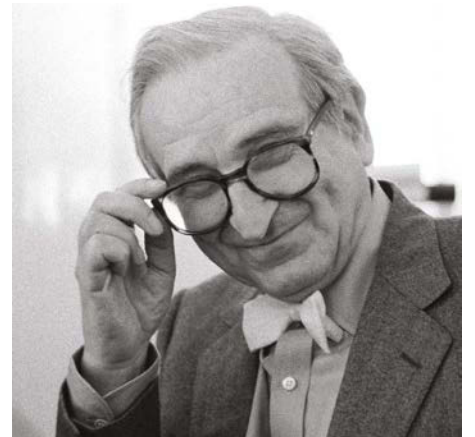
6



7



8



9

dialogue. The ECoC operate precisely within this interstice between local identity and supralocal belonging, transforming ephemeral events into enduring processes.

Aldo Rossi, with his vision of the city as the «locus of collective memory»<sup>26</sup>, and Bernardo Secchi, with his understanding of the city as a «cognitive device»<sup>27</sup>, offer key tools for grasping how these cultural experiences generate new maps, new affective and cognitive geographies.

On a philosophical level, the proposal of the *ecumenopolis* resonates with Peter Sloterdijk's<sup>28</sup> reflections on "spheres" and "shared interiors": European cities are no longer closed monads but relational environments, where identity is constructed through proximity and contamination. In parallel, Jürgen Habermas<sup>29</sup> has articulated the idea of a "European public sphere" founded on language, culture, and dialogue: the ECoCs perhaps represent the most successful experiment of this idea, operating at the symbolic, social, and urban levels.

Thus, the new cultural geography traced by the ECoCs is not merely a network of events or an institutional program, but a true cultural and territorial infrastructure. It redraws Europe as a "city of cities", an *ecumenopolis* where differences meet within an open, dynamic, multi-layered system. A diffuse city, without a single center yet full of meaning, where "living together" is not an option but a necessity.

In this *ecumenopolis*, culture is not merely content; it is the first form of cohesion — a project of space, a public infrastructure.

Through the ECoC, cities become spaces for democratic experimentation, symbolic and material regeneration, and the construction of a shared future. Europe is reborn through its cities, and it is within them that it reinvents itself.

We therefore conclude that the concept of the ECoC *ecumenopolis* represents the future of Europe: a continent where urban culture becomes the shared language, capable of communicating a collective identity that is constantly evolving. We close this essay with a gallery of nine figures, presented on the following page. They are not merely scholars of the city; they are the true "founding fathers" of the "discovery" of the "European city" and of the recognition of a distinct and specific urban culture of Eu-

rope, upon which the entire ECoC project and movement have been founded and developed over time. One need only reflect on the very name of the initiative — "Capital" — which explicitly references the city as a continental cultural phenomenon. If today we can say not only that "the city is culture" but even that "the European city is a culture", it is thanks to their studies, readings, and interpretations of the European urban form.

Thus, even before the contemporary ECoC initiatives of the European Community, and even before Melina Mercouri's brilliant intuition exactly forty years ago, the intellectual, material, and cultural origins of the European Capitals of Culture must be attributed to: Adam Smith, Leonardo Benevolo, Françoise Choay, Edith Ennen, Benedetto Gravagnuolo, Pierre Lavedan, Henri Pirenne, Marcel Poëte, and Joseph Rykwert.

## Notes

- 1 L. Benevolo, *La città nella storia d'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1993, p. 5.
- 2 C. Baudelaire, *Le cygne* (à Victor Hugo). This poem was included in the second edition of *The Flowers of Evil* and is contained in the second section of the collection, that of the so-called *Tableaux parisiens* (*The Parisian Paintings*).
- 3 M. Foucault, *Le parole e le cose. Un'archeologia delle scienze umane*, Milano, Mondadori, 2018 [1. ed. 1966], p. 392.
- 4 C. Dardi, *La sindrome dell'Oregon Trail*, in: "Spaziosport", n. 1, 1987.
- 5 P. Levedan, *Urbanisme et Architecture*, Paris, Henri Laurens Editeur, 1954.
- 6 L. Benevolo, *op. cit.*
- 7 L. Mumford, *La città nella storia*, Roma, Castelvechi, 2013 [1. ed. 1961].
- 8 E. Ennen, *Storia della città medievale*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1975.
- 9 F. Choay, *La regola e il modello. Sulla teoria dell'architettura e dell'urbanistica*, Roma, Officina, 1986.
- 10 B. Gravagnuolo, *Metamorfosi delle città europee. All'alba del XXI Secolo*, Napoli, CLEAN, 2011, p. 11.
- 11 The draft European Constitution, prepared by the Convention chaired by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (2002–2003), aimed to simplify existing treaties and strengthen the EU's political and cultural identity, explicitly acknowledging Europe's shared cultural heritage. Signed in 2004 but rejected in referendums in France and the Netherlands (2005), the Constitution never came into force. Its core elements were later incorporated into the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), although without constitutional symbols or language. The *Penelope* project, promoted by the Romano Prodi Commission, had already anticipated the need to streamline and unify the EU's institutional framework.
- 12 The *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, proclaimed in Nice in 2000 and made legally binding by the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), brings together civil, political, social, and economic rights recognized within the EU under six thematic chapters. Chapter V, dedicated to citizenship, guarantees rights such as voting and eligibility in European and local elections, freedom of movement and residence, the right to good administration, and consular protection. While the Charter does not explicitly mention the "right to the city," these provisions support active citizenship and equitable access to urban services
- core components of an inclusive and participatory urban life. The Charter applies to Member States only when implementing EU law, yet remains a key symbolic and legal reference for the protection of fundamental rights at the supranational level.
- 13 P. Lavedan, J. Hugueney, *L'urbanisme au Moyen Age*, Droz, Ginevra, 1974.
- 14 E. Ennen, *cit.*, p. 85.
- 15 B. Gravagnuolo, *La progettazione urbana in Europa. 1750-1960: storia e teorie*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1991.
- 16 M. Poëte, *La città antica. Introduzione all'urbanistica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1958, p. 92.
- 17 L. Benevolo, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
- 18 The geometric grid that overlaps previous traces from the Sixteenth century onward and the two major procedures, corresponding to the two major epochs, of reconversion and transformation of the industrial city introduced in the second half of the 1800s and the first third of the 1900s. In L. Benevolo, *op. cit.*, p. 222.
- 19 The concept of *urban milieu* was introduced in French geography by Pierre George (1951), who used it to describe the relationship between society and the urban environment in a geographical and environmental perspective. It was later developed by Paul Claval (1995) within cultural geography, where the milieu is understood as a system of representations and practices that shape the experience of space. In urban, architectural and socio-spatial theory, the notion was further enriched by Henri Lefebvre (1974), who theorized the social production of urban space, and by Augustin Berque (2000), who proposed a mediating (*médiance*) approach to the relationship between humans and their environment, to describe the landscape.
- 20K. Lynch, *L'immagine della città*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2013 [1. ed. 1960], p. 24; G. Cullen, *Townscape*, London, Architectural Press, 1961, p. 89.
- 21 J. Jacobs, *Vita e morte delle grandi città. Saggio sulle metropoli americane*, Torino, Einaudi, 2009 [1. ed. 1961].
- 22P. Hall, *Le città mondiali*, Torino, Il Saggiatore, 1966.
- 23Henri Lefebvre, one of the most influential thinkers in urban theory, developed a very important concept regarding the "production of space." His main lesson is that space is not something natural or given, but is socially produced. According to Lefebvre, the production of space is a complex process that involves political, economic, and social aspects. It is not a passive object, but is actively created through social practices and power

relations. His ideas are gathered in one of his most famous works, H. Lefebvre, *La produzione dello spazio*, Milano, Pgreco, 2018 [1. ed. 1974], where he distinguishes three aspects of the conception of space: 1. Perceived space. What we can see, touch, and experience in our daily lives. It is the physical space in which social practices take place. 2. Conceived space. Represented by ideas, theoretical models, urban plans, and images created by institutions and professionals; 3. Lived space. That of daily experiences, social practices, behaviors, and emotions lived in a space. His lesson emphasizes how power and culture deeply influence the configuration of space, and how space, in turn, shapes and is shaped by social and political dynamics.

24F. De Dominicis, *Il progetto del mondo. Doxiadis, città e futuro. 1955-65*, Siracusa, LetteraVentidue, 2020.

25A fundamental reference in K. Frampton's writings on European architecture is his well-known text, which includes reflections on the "regional" and "layered" character of European architecture in the modern/contemporary context: K. Frampton, "Towards a critical regionalism: six points for an architecture of resistance," in: H. Foster (ed.), *The anti-aesthetic: essay on postmodern culture*, Port Townsend, Bay Press, 1983. Another text that deals with these topics is: K. Frampton, *Modern architecture. A critical history*, London, Thames&Hudson, 1980.

26A. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, Padova, Marsilio, 1966, p. 129.

27B. Secchi, *Prima lezione di urbanistica*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2002, p. 169-171.

28P. Sloterdijk, *Sfere I. Bolle, Microsferologia*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2014.

29J. Habermas, *Nuovo mutamento della sfera pubblica e politica deliberativa*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2023.



## Bibliography

- C. Baudelaire, *I Fiori del male*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2018 [1. ed. 1857].
- L. Benevolo, *La città nella storia d'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1993.
- L. Benevolo, *La cattura dell'infinito*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1991.
- A. Berque, *Ecumene. Introduction to the study of human environments*, Paris, Belin, 2000.
- F. Choay, *La regola e il modello. Sulla teoria dell'architettura e dell'urbanistica*, Roma, Officina, 1986.
- P. Claval, *Cultural Geography*, Paris, Nathan, 1995.
- G. Cullen, *Townscape*, London, Architectural Press, 1961.
- C. Dardi, La sindrome dell'Oregon Trail, in: "Spaziosport", n. 1, 1987. (published in M. Costanzo, *Architettura in forma di parole*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2009, p. 151).
- F. De Dominicis, *Il progetto del mondo. Doxiadis, città e futuro. 1955-65*, Siracusa, LetteraVentidue, 2020.
- E. Ennen, *Storia della città medievale*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1975.
- M. Foucault, *Le parole e le cose. Un'archeologia delle scienze umane*, Milano, Mondadori, 2018 [1. ed. 1966].
- K. Frampton, "Towards a critical regionalism: six points for an architecture of resistance", in: H. Foster (ed.), *The anti-aesthetic: essay on postmodern culture*, Port Townsend, Bay Press, 1983.
- K. Frampton, *Modern architecture. A critical history*. London, Thames&Hudson, 1980.
- P. George, *Active Geography*, Paris, PUF, 1951.
- B. Gravagnuolo, *Metamorfosi delle città europee. All'alba del XXI secolo*, Napoli, CLEAN, 2011.
- B. Gravagnuolo, *La progettazione urbana in Europa. 1750-1960: storia e teorie*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1991.
- V. Gregotti, *L'identità dell'architettura europea e la sua crisi*, Torino, Einaudi, 1999.
- J. Habermas, *Nuovo mutamento della sfera pubblica e politica deliberativa*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2023.
- P. Hall, *Le città mondiali*, Torino, Il Saggiatore, 1966.
- J. Jacobs, *Vita e morte delle grandi città. Saggio sulle metropoli americane*, Torino, Einaudi, 2009 [1. ed. 1961].
- H. Lefebvre, *La produzione dello spazio*, Milano, Pgreco, 2018 [1. ed. 1974].
- P. Levedan, *Urbanisme et Architecture*, Paris, Henri Laurens Editeur, 1954.
- P. Levedan, J. Hugueney, *L'urbanisme au Moyen Age*, Ginevra, Droz, 1974.
- K. Lynch, *L'immagine della città*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2013 [1. ed. 1960].
- L. Mumford, *La città nella storia*, Roma, Castelvechi, 2013 [1. ed. 1961].
- M. Poëte, *La città antica. Introduzione all'urbanistica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1958.
- A. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, Padova, Marsilio, 1966.
- B. Secchi, *Il racconto urbanistico*, Torino, Einaudi, 1984.
- B. Secchi, *Prima lezione di urbanistica*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2002.
- P. Sloterdijk, *Sfere I. Bolle, Microsfereologia*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2014.
- J. Rykwert, *L'idea di città. Antropologia della forma urbana nel mondo antico*, Torino, Einaudi, 1981.
- H. Pirenne, *Le città del Medioevo*, Bari, Laterza, 1974.





**Thomas Bisiani** is an architect and researcher in Architectural and Urban Design at the University of Trieste. He deals with project tools and methods and with the transformations of large architectural complexes within the broader context of urban culture.

**Sonia Prestamburgo** is full professor of Elements of Economics and Valuation at the University of Trieste, where she teaches Environmental Valuation and Landscape Management. From a research perspective, she deals with sustainability in the use of territorial resources, study of the processes of use and enhancement of urban space and landscape, analysis and application of models and tools for economic assessment and control of impacts at different scales.

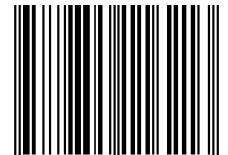
**Adriano Venudo** is an architect and associate professor in Architectural and Urban Design at the University of Trieste. He deals with architecture and the city, with a focus on reuse, green infrastructures and contemporary urban landscapes, exploring integrated and operational design approaches.

All the authors have been dealing for years, in an interdisciplinary way through teaching and research, with urban culture and the relationship between architecture, city and politics. Their work develops in the wake of Pierre George's thought on the urban milieu, a concept introduced in French geography already in the 1950s to describe, in a geographical-environmental key, the structural relationship between society, man and the urban environment.

What if culture could redesign the city?

This volume explores forty years of the European Capital of Culture Programme as a tool for urban transformation and regeneration. Through case studies, essays and mappings, the text tells how architecture, temporary events, art, happenings and cultural strategies can generate new urban futures. A collective and interdisciplinary journey, which explores the image of the city and imagines and designs its reality in progress.

Euro 38,00



9 788855 116213 >