

Volume 2

With texts by:

Giorgia Aquilar, Giuseppe Biasi, Hakim Cherkaoui,
Davide di Martino, Sabina Favaro, Urtzi Grau,
Francesco Krecic, Ilaria Mazzoleni, Oorvi Sharma,
Luka Skansi, Gianni Talamini, Giambattista Zaccariotto

Edited by LUDOVICO CENTIS, MATTEO D'AMBROS

**SPECULATIONS
ON THE IMAGE
OF BEAUTY
*PUBLIC SPACE
AND GLOBAL
COASTAL CITIES***

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- 4 From the shore: New horizons for the project of the city
16 Nolli map relaoded
Ludovico Centis, Matteo D'Ambros
- 18 Abu Dhabi
30 Deeper than skin: accretive value, recognition,
conservation. Leveraging existing built heritage in Abu Dhabi
through transformative practice
Oorvi Sharma
- 38 Cape Town
50 Living (apart-)together in Cape Town:
shared spaces in transition
Sabina Favaro
- 62 Hong Kong
74 Hong Kong's public space in nine figures
Gianni Talamini
- 84 Los Angeles
96 Between waters: Treading the line of global urbanity
Ilaria Mazzoleni
- 104 Marseille
116 Marseille, *Total Khéops*
Giuseppe Biasi
- 124 Naples
136 Miraculous arsenal of broken things
Giorgia Aquilar
142 Internal open space
Davide di Martino
- 146 Oslo
158 Oslo, the project of the city
Giambattista Zaccariotto

Summary

- 170 Rijeka
182 From Fiume to Rijeka: a city of superimpositions
Luka Skansi
- 188 Rio de Janeiro
202 Rio de Janeiro, a tropical city in the Tijuca forest
Matteo D'Ambros
- 216 Sydney
228 Sydney does not exist
Urtzi Grau
- 238 Tangier
250 Public space in Tangier between invention and reconquest
Hakim Cherkaoui
- 256 Trieste
268 The maritime station of Trieste. Topicality of a story
Francesco Krecic
- 276 Bibliography
- 284 Biographies

FROM THE SHORE: NEW HORIZONS FOR THE PROJECT OF THE CITY

Ludovico Centis
Matteo D'Ambros

Speculations on the image of beauty. Public spaces and global coastal cities investigates the evolving forms and meanings of urban open spaces within twelve global coastal urban contexts in Abu Dhabi, Cape Town, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Marseille, Naples, Oslo, Rijeka, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Tangier and Trieste. The research has been articulated in two complementary sides, each returned in one of the two volumes. Volume One gathers the theoretical, historical, and interpretative reflections that frame the conceptual ground of the investigation, while this second one concentrates on the empirical outcomes and case studies, proposing the current configuration of a significant part of each city which is described and illustrated through original drawings, historical maps, iconographic materials, and a thematic critical essay specifically developed by an invited contributor for the occasion. Volume Two specifically focuses on a reading – or re-reading – of the city, of open spaces, of the relationships between built spaces and of the ways in which space can be practised and transformed in the broadest sense. It is in these dynamic environments that the changes taking place in societies are revealed and become particularly evident. In light of the epochal socioeconomic and climatic challenges to our contemporary society, and given an increasingly complex transformative framework, this volume posits that open space gives space to reflection on the quality and value of contemporary urban planning, allowing us to define new uses and performances in an ambitious and prescient way. By investigating the forms, connotations and devices with which the open space is equipped, by identifying the semantic values of inclusion and exclusion in the ways in which open space is used and occupied, the contributors develop an active critical reflection on the potential of open space as a project. Taking these elements as its starting point, the volume proposes a reasoned and critical reading of open space in its various aspects, investigating some notable urban experiences chosen among global coastal cities. In such cities, the challenges caused by climate change and by the search for an increasingly fragile balance between economic development, justice and social inclusion manifest themselves in a more explicit and paradigmatic way. During the creation of this volume, the work of mapping, measuring, reasoning and representing the cities, both textually and graphically, took on an increasingly important role for the reflections shared between its contributors. The Nolli Map itself seemed to us to be the most suitable conceptual and operational reference for exploring significant portions of

the twelve coastal cities. While reference to the Nolli Map is by no means a new exercise in itself,¹ this volume is innovative in its comparison of twelve global coastal cities through a Nolli-style mapping and in a redesign based on solids and voids along coastal strips.

The final and overall result is comparable to a kaleidoscope. While staking no claim to exhaustiveness or permanence, this volume seeks to reveal essential and significant features of the urban environments and to investigate them in their different manifestations. The authors of this volume give space to a number of questions and points for discussion, some of which can be listed briefly as hypotheses for future discussions in the field of urban studies. Oorvi Sharma describes the accelerated transformations of urban spaces which are entirely disconnected from the traditions present in Abu Dhabi. Sabina Favaro turns her attention to the difficulty of implementing an effective spatial justice project capable of decolonising an altered urbanity in Cape Town. Gianni Talamini looks at the tortuous project of infrastructure and densification of the city, producer of devices of inclusion and exclusion within the controlled sphere of contemporary public space in Hong Kong. Ilaria Mazzoleni discusses the ecological tensions inspiring new cohabitations in Los Angeles, which are hoped for as possible foundations of an unprecedented redistributive spirit that may be able to overcome the contradictions of the Anthropocene.

Giuseppe Biasi narrates the emotional and experiential charge in the landscapes of Marseille, where the need for urban renewal passes through the construction of an idea of a constantly evolving society. Giorgia Aquilar and Davide di Martino trace the almost ancestral porosity and radical planning that can be summed up in the potential of the hybrid, physical and historical spaces of Naples. Giambattista Zaccariotto examines the paradox of the capitalist project, a clear contradiction of an induced and, at times, forced renewal, capable, however, of reconquering and reformulating unprecedented spatial relationships in the city of Oslo. Luka Skansi illustrates the complex semantic and geopolitical stratification of a modernity that has

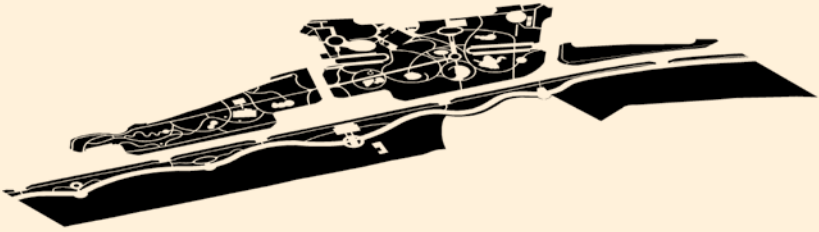
1 See for example, among the most recent experiences, the mapping exercise of the city of Nanjing described in Ji and Ding (2021) or even before that, the famous mapping of the Las Vegas Strip by Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour (1972). Other design experiences and contemporary theoretical reflections can be found in Verstegen and Ceen (2013).

perhaps become both too fluid and an unresolved urban design paradigm of the present in Rijeka. Matteo D'Ambros looks at the constant cumulative capacity for storing a composite biodiversity, made up of naturalness and socio-cultural heritage, which together build a capital and are fundamental for constant survival and regeneration in Rio de Janeiro. Urtzi Grau turns to the young, artificial and hyper-planned modernity that celebrates a hierarchical and exclusive neoliberal idea, aimed at progressively stabilising Sydney's urban development. Hakim Cherkaoui captures the constant search for identity and reformulation of public space in the need to achieve an image of semblance with an international character in Tangier. Finally, Francesco Krecic turns to the choice to transform and modernise that, though hoped for, is, never fully achieved, or grasped, in Trieste. Through a vibrant debate resulting from multiple experiences and points of view, these themes and issues can and should contribute to the construction of a renewed project for the city.

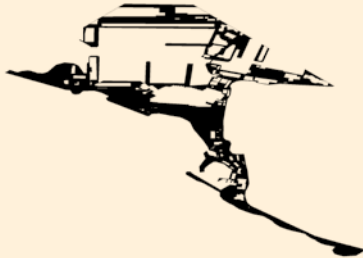
The exploded axonometric views on pages 10-16 render the accessible coastal area in the urban contexts of the twelve cities – Abu Dhabi, Cape Town, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Marseille, Naples, Oslo, Rijeka, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Tangier, Trieste – considered through solids and voids. All drawings are of the same scale.

This volume was conceived and created by ideas and reflections developed within the “Theories and design of public space” course of the Master’s Degree in Architecture at the University of Trieste, conducted by Ludovico Centis and Matteo D’Ambros in the academic year 2023-2024. During the semester, the students were coordinated and distributed into working groups.

Abu Dhabi



Cape Town



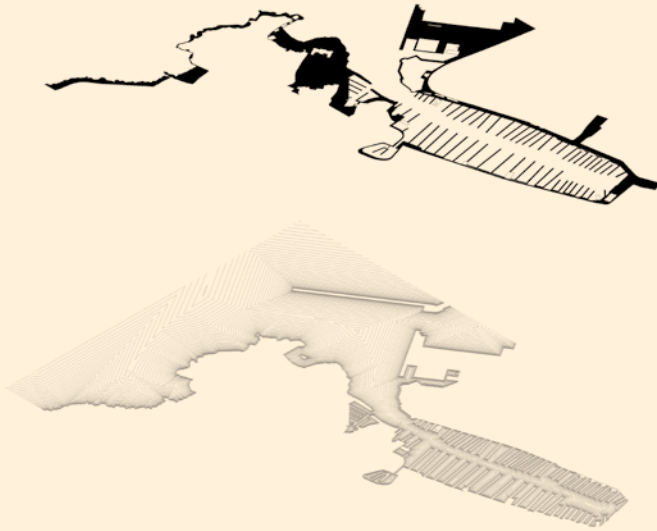
Hong Kong



Los Angeles



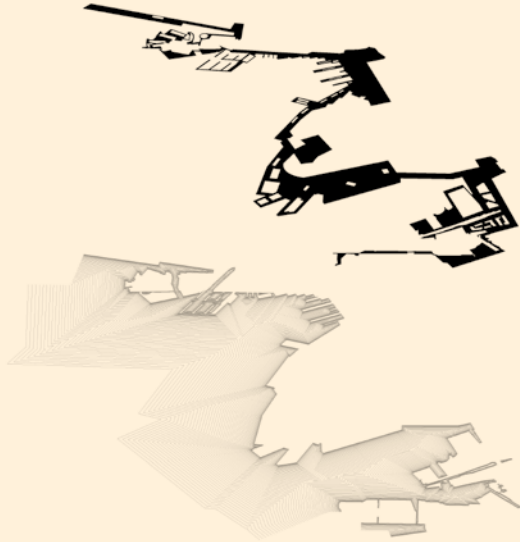
Marseille



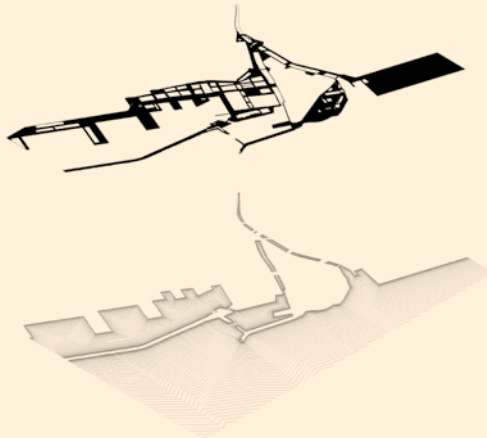
Naples



Oslo



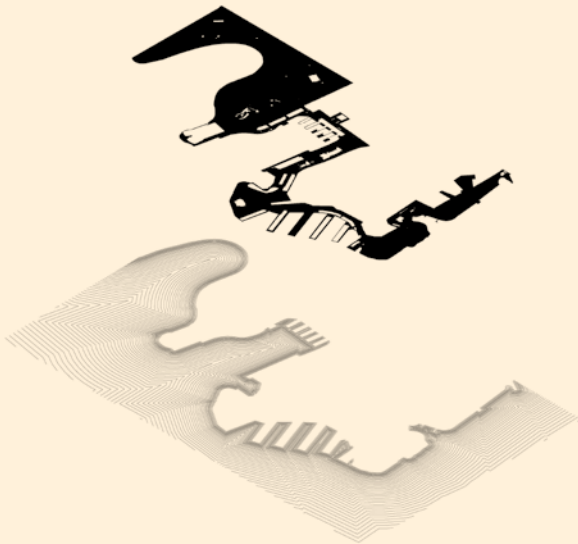
Rijeka



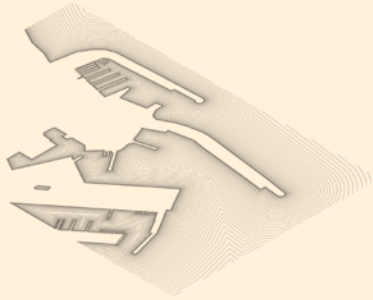
Rio de Janeiro



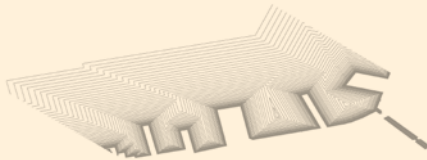
Sydney



Tangier



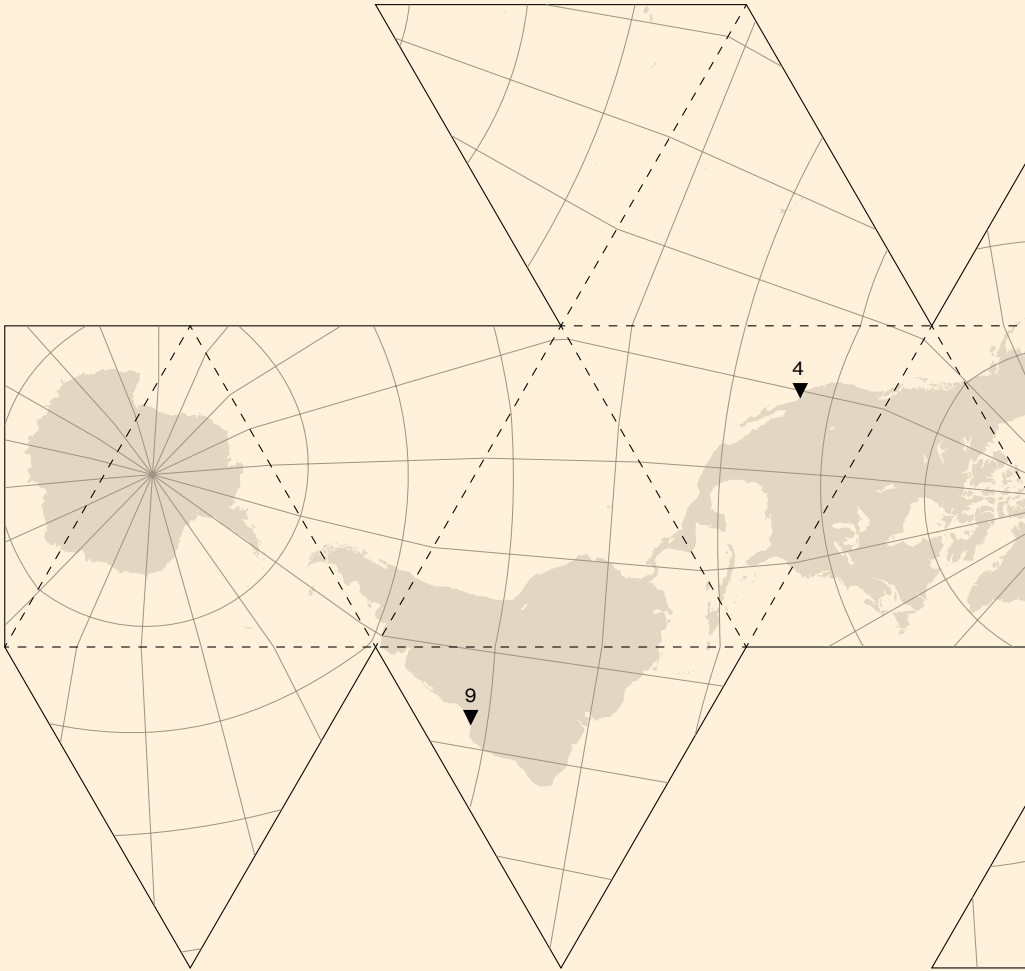
Trieste



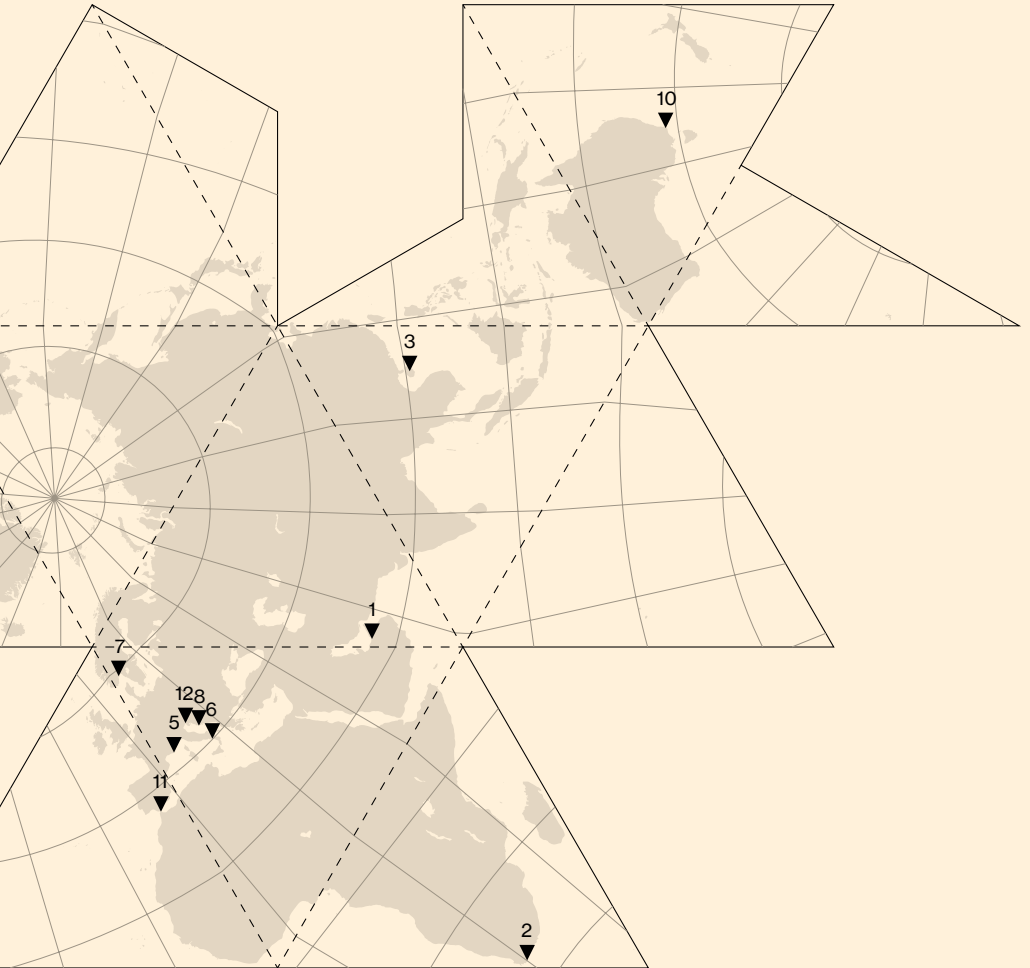
In the following pages, some glimpses of Abu Dhabi, Cape Town, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Marseille, Naples, Oslo, Rijeka, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Tangier and Trieste are briefly presented. Each section dedicated to the cities begins with zenithal views that frame a significant portion of the territory, extending over a surface of 800×1500 meters. The three views include: an aerial photogrammetric image, an ichnography of the current state of the city and an interpretation of the open space system inspired by Nolli's method of representation. The latter was developed by expanding and reinterpreting the graphic indications of the 1748 New Plan of Rome and its legend. In particular, the graphic code has been updated to reflect the contemporary use of the spaces.

Finally, each city is described through historical maps and significant panoramic images, which highlight a relevant aspect of its evolution over time. At the end of each section dedicated to the cities, an essay broadens the perspective, focusing on themes and issues related to the current topicalities of the urban project.

	Trees
<i>CORSO VALDOCCO</i>	Toponymy
	Permeable grassy surface
	Permeable surface
	Impermeable surface
	Buildings
	Buildings perimeter
	Perimeter of the built public space
	Built public space
	Fresh water
	Salt water



1. Abu Dhabi
2. Cape Town
3. Hong Kong
4. Los Angeles
5. Marseille
6. Naples
7. Oslo
8. Rijeka
9. Rio de Janeiro
10. Sydney
11. Tangier
12. Trieste



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Biographies

Giorgia Aquilar, lecturer at Berlin International University of Applied Sciences - is an architect and postdoctoral researcher at the Technical University of Munich. She currently holds a fellowship awarded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Her research stands at the intersection of architectural theory, urban design and historic preservation, with a special focus on evolutionary taxonomies and strategies for heritage futures. She has published a number of articles and essays on related themes. She has been the recipient of grants and fellowships for her scholarly work, including from the Harvard Research Center Dumbarton Oaks, the Stuckeman School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at The Pennsylvania State University.

Ila Bêka e Louise Lemoine. Artists filmmakers working at the crossroads of visual arts and non fiction cinema. For the past twenty years, Bêka & Lemoine's work has been exploring a critical perspective on architecture as a subtle instrument of social control. Through an observational and often humorous perspective, their cinematic approach foregrounds the frictions between design and daily life, revealing how people experience, adapt to, resist, or reinterpret architectural intentions. Their work emphasize how architecture governs not only movement and behaviour, but also emotions and social dynamics. Together they have made over forty films, among which 'Koolhaas HouseLife' (2008), 'Barbicania' (2014), 'The Infinite Happiness' (2015), 'Moriyama San' (2017), 'Tokyo Ride' (2020) and the city-matographic odyssey in 14 films 'Homo Urbanus' (2017-ongoing). In 2023, they published the book *The Emotional Power of Space* (B&P ed.). Their films have been widely presented in international film festivals and leading art and architecture museums, including Fondation Beyeler (Basel), Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain (Paris), Fondation Prada (Milan), MAXXI (Rome), La Biennale di Venezia (Venice), and the Barbican Art Gallery (London), among others.

Giuseppe Biasi graduated under Professor Franco Purini from the Venice Institute of Architecture in 2002. He combined teaching with professional architecture, investigating spatial and relational systems. Founding partner of BBV Architetti, a planning and design studio founded in 2002 in Padova, he works in the public and private construction sector, developing residential, tourism, office and commercial projects, as well as public spaces, sports facilities and rural planning. He holds a PhD in Urban Planning from the IUAV University of Venice with Bernardo Secchi. As a contract professor of architectural design he taught at the IUAV University of Venice, Faculty of Architecture, and the Polytechnic of Milan, Faculty of Architecture. He has edited and participated in publications, exploring themes of architecture, urban planning, and contemporary art and received mentions in international design competitions. He lives and works in Marseille and Padova.

Ludovico Centis is an architect, founder of office The Empire and co-founder and editor of San Rocco magazine. He has been a partner at the architectural office Salottobuono from 2007 to 2012. Centis holds a PhD in urbanism (Università Iuav di Venezia) and is currently assistant professor in urbanism at the University of Trieste. His research focuses on the ways in which individuals and institutions, as well as desires and power, shape cities and landscapes. Centis has published numerous essays and scientific articles in Italian and international journals, including Domus, Town Planning Review, Landscape Journal, Log, OASE, San Rocco, Topos, Arch+, AA Files, Harvard Design

Magazine. Recent monographs and edited volumes include *Reyner Banham: A set of actual tracks* (2024), *The Lake of Venice. A scenario for Venice and its lagoon* (2022, with Lorenzo Fabian) and *A parallel of ruins and landscapes* (2019).

Hakim Cherkaoui is an architect and responsible for the DESA *Le logement marocain chez l'architecte, rôle et place de l'architecte*. He has held positions of responsibility within the Ministry of Urban Planning, Construction and Planning of the Kingdom of Morocco. Between 2009 and 2015 he was coordinator of the National Architecture Institute of Tetouan, and between 2015 and 2020 director of the same institution. He teaches at the Ecole Nationale d'Architecture of Rabat since 1999 courses related to architectural design, history and theory, and architectural workshops. In 2020 he was coordinator of the research *Civil society and territorial urban transitions in the Mediterranean*, while between 2021-2023 he was responsible for the Moroccan chapter of the MeLiMed project. In the years 2020-2021 Cherkaoui was part of the board of the PhD *La fabrique de la ville, cas des neighborhoods informels* at Laboratoire LIEU, Institut of urbanism and regional development in Aix-en-Provence.

Matteo D'Ambros is an architect with a PhD in urbanism (Università Iuav di Venezia) and is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Trieste. He has previously taught at the Iuav University of Venice and the Polytechnic University of Turin. His academic and professional trajectory unfolds within the field of urban and landscape design, where his research and practice focus on the maintenance, transformation, and adaptive reuse of open spaces. Since 2008, he has been investigating the work of Roberto Burle Marx, editing with Barbara Boifava the books *Roberto Burle Marx. Verso un moderno paesaggio tropicale* (2014) and *Roberto Burle Marx. Un progetto per il paesaggio* (2009, 2010). He co-curated the exhibition *Up! Marghera on Stage* at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2016 and is founder of the environmental action group Ground Action.

Davide di Martino is an architect and Director of Unagru Architecture Urbanism, a London-based practice. He studied architecture in Naples, Barcelona and Venice, and earned a PhD in Urbanism from the University of Naples Federico II, with a thesis on ecologies and pollution in Campania. He was a visiting PhD student at The New School in New York and at KU Copenhagen. From 2020 to 2023, he co-directed a unit of the Master's in Architectural Design at Cardiff University. In 2018, he founded Unagru Architecture Urbanism, a practice that balances private work, research and activism. Its projects range from small-scale interventions to mixed-use developments, with a focus on heritage, water and sustainability.

Sabina Favaro is an architect, urbanist, and researcher at the Responsible Mining Lab (University of the Witwatersrand), critically engaging with socio-ecological regeneration in extractive landscapes. Sabina also co-teaches Landscape Architecture Design Studio with Tarna Klitzner at the University of Cape Town. She holds advanced degrees in Architecture and a PhD in Urbanism. Her research focuses on socio-spatial justice, ecological design, and inclusive urbanism in the Global South. Employing thick mapping, counter-mapping, and co-design methodologies, she investigates cities, landscapes, and territories to reimagine collective futures. Her work emphasizes practical outcomes for communities impacted by mining and urban inequality. She led the Co-Design for Spatial Justice team in the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading project, focusing on co-design, crime prevention, and integrated governance.

Urtzi Grau is an architect and academic at the School of Architecture at the University of

Technology Sydney and has recently been appointed Editor-in-Chief of *Quaderns*. He is the founder of Urtzi Grau / Fake Industries, an architectural office that explores replicas – both as literal reproductions of existing works and as responses to prior statements, in the sense conveyed by Romance languages – to produce architectural. His recent projects include the Biblioteca de Lorenteggio in Milan, the Murrin Bridge Preschool and the Bass Hill Community Centre in New South Wales, and the OE House in Tarragona. Grau's work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale, the Lisbon Triennale, the Istanbul Design Biennial, and the Seoul Biennale. His projects are part of the permanent collections of the Centre Pompidou and the Art Institute of Chicago. He is the author of several books, including *Analogue Images* (Perimeter, 2024), *Folk Costumes Indo Pacific Air* (APE, 2022), *Better Together: Stories of Contemporary Documents* (URO, 2022), and *Learning to Live Together: Humans, Cars, and Kerbs in Solidarity* (Bartlebooth, 2021). Grau holds a Distinguished Visiting Professorship at Portland State University's School of Architecture and a Cullinan Visiting Professorship at Rice University School of Architecture.

Francesco Krecic is an architect and graduated from the Post-Graduate Specialisation School in Architectural and Landscape Heritage at Politecnico di Milano. Following several collaborations with architectural offices in Trieste, since 2010 he has been enrolled in the public administration, initially as an assistant at the Superintendence of Fine Arts and Landscape of Friuli Venezia Giulia region and later as an officer of the Ministry of Culture at the Historical Museum and Park of the Miramare Castle, where he has curated various restoration projects. Currently he is an officer of the Superintendence of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape of Friuli Venezia Giulia. Krecic has lectured widely in national and international conferences and is the author of various publications on topics related to the history of architecture and heritage restoration.

Ilaria Mazzoleni is an architect, biomimicist, educator and the founder of IM Studio Milano/ Los Angeles (www.imstudio.us) and of Nature, Art & Habitat (www.nahr.it). She lives and works between Italy and California. Her research focuses on sustainability and biomimicry, where innovation in planning, architecture and design is inspired by the processes and functions of nature. Her built and conceptual work in the fields of sustainable architecture and biomimicry has been published internationally. Mazzoleni has been a faculty member at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), CalPoly Pomona, and CalArts in Los Angeles. Mazzoleni has authored and published the book *Architecture Follows Nature - Biomimetic Principles for Innovative Design* (CRC Press, 2013). She is the main editor and Introduction author of the book *Transect of Coexistence: Inquiry into Nature, Art & Habitat* (ListLab, 2024). Ilaria holds a Laurea in Architecture (Milan Polytechnic,) and a Master of Building Science (USC, Los Angeles).

Oorvi Sharma is a Canadian architect, curator, expert advisor, and academic. Oorvi presently holds the position of Assistant Professor of Architecture at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, while concurrently serving as Curatorial-Project Management Lead and Acquisitions Lead for the Qasr Al Hosn in Abu Dhabi with the Department of Culture and Tourism, Abu Dhabi. She is an alumna of the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, where she studied as an Irving Fellow. Her work on material culture in built environments, climate change, global shifts, and modern conservation movements has been profiled by the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, ICON Magazine, SVSA Magazine, and other international media. Oorvi has curated and produced a range of important

exhibitions, notably the Parisian presentation of LVMH Métiers d'Art's 9th Résidence Artistique in 2025. She also realized the Miqnaş Pavilion for ADIHEX 2025, a modular installation uniting local craft with contemporary construction, which was presented to His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and widely featured in national newspapers. Oorvi has lectured internationally, sharing her knowledge of the UAE, the Western Canadian region, and the Indian Himalayan region. She is often invited to speak on the advancement of culture-based climate action and the future of public space at events including the Public Art Abu Dhabi Biennale, talks at the Fiker Institute, and the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week. Her writing has been widely published and translated into Spanish, Catalan, French, Hindi, Italian, and Arabic. She has over ten years of global professional experience across Tokyo, San Francisco, Boston, Abu Dhabi, and Mumbai.

Luka Skansi is an architectural historian, associate professor at Politecnico di Milano (DASTU – Dipartimento di Architettura e Studi Urbani). His research ranges across different geographical and temporal contexts of the 20th century, and focuses on the themes of spatiality in architecture, construction or its relationship with geopolitics. Awarded with the Plečnik medal in 2018 (for the exhibition-catalogue *Streets and Neighbourhoods*, MAO Ljubljana, 2016) and Neven Šegvić prize (for *Dobrolet*, a book series in architectural history and theory, 2025). He was a member of the curatorial committee of the exhibitions *Toward a Concrete Utopia. Architecture in Socialist Yugoslavia 1948-1980* (MoMA – NY, 2018), *Fiume Fantastika. Phenomena of the City* (Rijeka – ECC 2020), and *Affinità confinanti/Bordering Affinities/Sosedske afinitete* (with Paolo Nicoloso, Trieste, Magazzino delle Idee, 2025).

Gianni Talamini, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering at the City University of Hong Kong. He earned his PhD in Urbanism from IUAV University of Venice under Professor Bernardo Secchi. Previously, he was a postdoctoral fellow at Harbin Institute of Technology in Shenzhen. Gianni's research focuses on the synergy between the built environment and landscape, aiming for an environmentally innocuous, culturally leavened, and spatially just society.

Giambattista Zaccariotto is associate professor at the Institute of Urbanism and Landscape of the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO). He holds a European Doctorate in Urbanism from the IUAV University of Venice, undertaken in collaboration with Delft University of Technology (TU Delft). His scholarly and practice work explore the interrelations among landscape architecture, urban design, and territorial planning, focusing on contemporary transformations of the built environment and design methodologies in European contexts. He has contributed to international academic programmes such as the *European Masters in Urbanism* (IUAV) and the *International Master in Landscape Architecture* (AHO).

Dr. Zaccariotto has collaborated on numerous urban and landscape design projects throughout Europe with leading design practices, including West 8 (Rotterdam), H+N+S (Amsterdam), Studio Secchi-Viganò (Milan), and Studio Bua (London). His academic and professional work has also engaged with European research frameworks such as *Interreg Europe* and *Horizon Europe*.

He is co-author of *Landscape of Water* (Risma, 2009), *Scarcity in Excess: The Built Environment and the Economic Crisis in Iceland* (Actar, 2014), and *Urbanistic Projects. Next Generational Paths: A European Perspective* (Quodlibet, 2024).

Colophon

Speculations on the image of beauty
Public space and global coastal cities

Volume 2

Edited by Ludovico Centis, Matteo D'Ambros

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This volume proposes a reasoned and critical reading of open space in its various aspects, investigating some notable urban experiences chosen among global twelve coastal cities – Abu Dhabi, Cape Town, Rijeka, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Marseille, Naples, Oslo, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Tangier and Trieste –, and illustrated through original drawings and historical maps, iconographic images and a thematic critical text, specifically developed by a guest contributor invited for the occasion. In such cities, the challenges caused by climate change and by the search for an increasingly fragile balance between economic development, justice and social inclusion manifest themselves in a more explicit and paradigmatic way. The starting point for observing ongoing phenomena and defining new research trajectories is not only physical or geographical but also concerns the complex socio-ecological and systemic dimension of coastal territories, where nature, infrastructure, and settlements interact in an interdependent way.

Current configurations of the twelve cities are studied revealing the relationship between solids and voids along the coastal edge. Within the iconographic section of the volume, a Nolli-style mapping is used as a tool to explore significant portions of the cities. The *New Map of Rome* completed in 1748 by Giovan Battista Nolli – one of the most famous and most lastingly influential cartographic representations – seemed to be the most suitable conceptual and operational reference for bringing to light the value of open spaces in the contemporary city and to uncover some of its inherent contradictions. By investigating the forms, meanings and spatial devices that shape the open space, and by identifying the semantic values of inclusion and exclusion embedded in its use and occupation, we develop diverse perspectives and a critical understanding of its potential as a project.

All these elements are the starting point for advancing a reasoned interpretation and critical reading of open space in its various aspects, assuming that global coastal cities are the places most affected by the challenges caused by climate change, and that it is precisely here that reflection on the quality and meaning of contemporary urban planning and design can be encouraged.