



Design of Public Space: An Essential Tool for a Better Future

El diseño del espacio público: Una herramienta esencial para posibilitar un mejor futuro

O desenho do espaço público: Uma ferramenta essencial para tornar possível um futuro melhor

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This book sets out from an acutely worrying observation: the way in which architecture and urbanism have been widely practiced in recent decades, and are still most commonly practiced and taught, is leading to a catastrophic loss of well-designed public space. As the authors say, “in the Modern city there is a great deal of open space—even too much—but there is no public space,” at least of the kind where citizens can gather, “where freedom and equality prevail,” a “place of interaction, discussion and—if necessary—civil disobedience,” “of reception,” “of encounter with the other.” The prevailing conception of open space is of a formless

void between built objects, “full of limitations and barriers,” whose content is often dictated by traffic, and where “the liberty of the citizen is relegated to that of the consumer.”

The authors take a constructive approach to the issue, with a brilliant proposal: let us look at the best precedents around us, organize them into operational categories, analyze them by drawing them all in a way allowing us to highlight their qualities, and look at them comparatively; let us apprehend them in this way and then propagate them as models for better contemporary practice.

Their case studies range from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries, from Italian towns of all kinds and sizes. The examples are chosen not for their historic significance, relative renown, or picturesque character but for their potential as practical models, in categories based on form and type, namely “portico,” “loggia,” “covered square,” “urban courtyard,” “gallery,” “steps,” “urban terrace,” “bridge,” “city room,” and “frame.” Each one is developed with a few examples and a brief text, a set of drawings (a Nolli-type map, a detailed plan of the public space, section elevations, and an axonometric view), and five pages of excellent photos.

This is an exemplary publication, with the added value of its potential to inspire other works with similar aims and principles with a view to the design of a more habitable public realm.

Labics (Maria Claudia Clemente and Francesco Isidori with a text by Marco Biraghi)

The Architecture of Public Space

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