

NEWS

Marseille and Elche: Joint Winners of the European Prize for Urban Public Space 2014

The two winning projects of this year's European Prize for Urban Public Space awarded by the Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB) are the Redevelopment of the Old Port in Marseille (France) and The Braided Valley in Elche (Spain).

The Vieux-Port of Marseille is the largest urban harbour in Europe. The foundational site of the capital of Provence, it was also the region's economic centre until the mid-19th century, when the transport of goods and passengers was moved to the Grand Port Maritime. The old harbour has a narrow entrance flanked by two old fortifications and it occupies a natural bay where the central districts of the city converge. However, despite its beauty and central location, the port had fallen into neglect and a state of disrepair by the end of the twentieth century. The prevalence of yacht clubs, which cluttered the port with architectural and visual barriers, blocked public access to 80 per cent of the docks area where, in addition, pedestrian use was discouraged due to the great amount of vehicular traffic. In 2009, the City Council and the Marseille Provence Métropole (MPM) called for entries in a competition aimed at rectifying the situation. The first phase of the renovation has

cleared obstacles and vehicular transport from the port's three wharves, which are now uniformly paved in pale granite, evoking the original limestone cobblestones. The Quai des Belges, the central wharf, devotes 60 per cent of its surface to pedestrians and also protects them from the sun beneath the Grande Ombrière, a rectangular canopy of 1,000 square metres, which can also be used for large crowd-pulling events. New floating docks have been installed in order to accommodate waterfront activities without interfering with the pedestrian flow or with views.

Thanks to a consultative process, the port has recovered its vitality by taking the general public's interest into account. The presence of leisure craft, which fosters economic and associative activity, has been made compatible with access and enjoyment for all citizens. Hence, while other urban ports combat economic decline by allowing privatised uses that undermine their role as public space, the Vieux-Port has been renovated by improving its status as a shared place open to everyone.

The project was developed by MPM Communauté urbaine Marseille Provence Métropole, Direction des Infrastructures with Michel Desvigne Paysagiste MDP, Foster + Partners,



The events pavilion of the Old Port in Marseille is a canopy of highly reflective stainless steel. Its mirrored surface reflects the surroundings and tapers towards the edges, minimising its profile and reducing the structure's visual impact.



The renovation of the Vieux-Port clears the docks of visual and architectural barriers, thus making the presence of leisure boats compatible with visitor's access and enjoyment of all citizens.

Tangram, Ingerop and AIK. A Park in Spain near Elche, developed by Ayuntamiento de Elche with Francisco Leiva Ivorra, Marta García Chico, Antoni Baile Jiménez, and Prócero del Real Baeza, is the other winning project. The Vinalopó River is considerably reduced in size by the time it crosses the city of Elche. Irriga-

tion upstream and very irregular rainfall mean that water only flows in any abundance during the autumn, when sudden flooding can occur. This has cut out a riverbed that has steep sides, mainly as a result of landslides. In the 1970s, major channelling work put an end to flooding but also eliminated the net-

work of paths by which residents on the right bank could reach the adjoining Palmaral, a vast palm grove that is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Relegated to the condition of a marginal rubbish tip, the watercourse became a barrier that divided the city into two halves, both of which faced away from it.

In 2009, the City Council called for entries in a competition aimed at converting the riverbed into a three-kilometre-long linear park. The first phase of the work was completed on the upstream section, where the social deterioration of neighbourhoods and a scarcity of bridges made improvement most urgent. A temporary in situ office collected data on the areas of movement that were most requested by future users. A network of paths was thus designed and built, which led to the name "The Braided Valley", as the paths criss-cross on both sides of the river, which were also replanted with native species of vegetation. Before reaching the walls of the channel and joining to cross the riverbed, the paths rise up in a Y-shape, forming two footbridges that rest on clusters of metal pillars resembling tree trunks, giving a certain lightness to the structures. Before completing the first phase of the project, however, the newly elected city council stopped all work, because it had inherited the project and did not embrace it as its own. "The Braided Valley" has not been officially opened yet, although local residents have spontaneously made it their own. With similar spontaneity, the riverside paths and bridges disregard the orthogonal

nature of the urban layout and anticipate footpaths that a pedestrian's common sense would leave on a badly situated parterre or on the ground of a snowbound city. It is to be hoped that common sense will prevail and that work on this park, which already stitches together the neighbourhoods through which it passes and connects them with natural spaces to the north of the city, will soon proceed anew. In this year's award, a total of

274 projects from 194 cities and 30 European countries were presented. The Prize is an honorary award to both authors and promoters of the works chosen. The prize-winning projects, the finalists and a selection made by the jury will be published in the European Archive of Urban Public Space, which has brought together and publicised the best projects awarded the Prize since it was first offered in 2000. The Centre of Contemporary Culture of

Barcelona (CCCB) organises this prize together with six European institutions: the Deutsches Architekturmuseum of Frankfurt (DAM); the Museum of Finnish Architecture of Helsinki (MFA); the Museum of Architecture and Design of Ljubljana (MAO); The Architecture Foundation of London (AF); La Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine of Paris (Cité) and the Architekturzentrum Wien of Vienna (AzW). www.cccb.org

A network of interlaced paths and footbridges has transformed the bed of the Vinalopó River in Elche into a linear park that stitches together the neighbourhoods through which it passes, connecting them with natural spaces to the north of the city.



Peña Gramat