

IUPA 2024

Text **Peter Cachola Schmal**

After a three-year hiatus, the International Urban Project Award has returned with a new focus: For the 2024 edition, project organisers have decided to feature one of their key program points, “interfaces.” Presented by Bauwelt and the World Architecture Magazine, the IUPA has received support from BAU China, Messe München and the Architecture Society of China. The award recognizes exceptional urban and architectural projects that have changed cities around the world. With a special emphasis on the intersection of architecture and urban space, the award showcases the impact that buildings, urban design and landscape architecture have on cities. The IUPA highlights the way construction projects influence the public space and the development of urban neighborhoods, particularly in regard to the boundaries separating the public and the private, open and closed, inside and outside – all of which create different transitional situations. At the core of these transitions lies the experience of accessibility and a sense of belonging. More than 100 projects from 23 countries were submitted for the award. The winning and shortlisted projects demonstrate an awareness that the city as a whole should benefit from any new developments, and that even challenging construction projects or sites can be designed in a way to benefit the entire city. my

The IUPA jury in Beijing quickly recognized the growing importance of urban interfaces, particularly in terms of urban coexistence in the future. Two points are noteworthy: the post-Covid consequences for the nature of office work and the impact of online shopping. Both megatrends are directly impacting the role of city centers as former urban hubs. The technological revolution that has been forced upon us by the pandemic has led to significant changes in urban planning. This is driven by the ongoing employee reluctance to be physically present in the office. Despite calls and appeals, many large companies and public administrations in Germany have been unable to achieve at least 50% of the previous levels for employee physical presence. In some areas, the figure is reported to be less than a

third. Employees are increasingly moving out to the countryside, where rents are lower and living space is more plentiful. To motivate employees, several large companies are renting new complexes that offer greater spatial variety, but with a much smaller overall area, in order to save on rental costs. As a result, there are fewer personal spaces.

At the same time, online shopping has been increasing rapidly, and technologies have been perfected. It is now common practice to pay electronically and to have purchases delivered by parcel services or couriers. This trend is particularly evident in China, where it appears to be more pronounced than in Germany. This in turn gives rise to significant shifts in traffic patterns, leading to fewer commuters and more logistics-

related journeys. This has had a devastating effect on stores, restaurants, service providers, and other businesses near office districts, resulting in significant challenges for the retail real estate market. There is a growing awareness that city centers must evolve beyond their traditional roles as shopping and work destinations.

The conversion of central department stores is currently being tested in so-called real laboratories. The questions that arise in this context are: What functions are feasible and appropriate for city centers, particularly when it comes to gastronomy, sports, and culture? Which functions will continue to offer sound investment opportunities for developers? What are the key factors that bind and divide society? What are the driving forces in each location? The importance of amenities in inner-city public spaces is growing. At the same time, there is a growing need for places for people to interact and exchange ideas, and thus the creation of additional, openly accessible third places is also gaining importance.

In this regard, the IUPA First Prize project, the Harbor Masterplan – designed by BIG and located in Aarhus, Denmark's second-largest city – is a prime example of excellence in urban design. The transformation of a former industrial port into a vibrant new urban district has provided credible answers to the questions above. The area offers a variety of amenities, including residential, commercial, dining, and recreational options, including a seaside swimming pool. The new harbor district is an attractive proposition, with many others keen to become involved. The project's ability to attract both residents and office workers has been a crucial factor in its development. Its perceived success will encourage others to co-invest or replicate the project. The area has since become a tourist attraction, which in turn has instilled a sense of pride among the existing residents. In addition, the project

has attracted international interest, with large numbers of people from across the globe visiting to see the architecture and urban planning in action. Aarhus serves as an exemplary model.

The Shenzhen Lotus Water Culture Base in Honghu Park, receiving a Special Prize, appears to operate in a comparable manner. An otherwise unpleasant location has been transformed and redefined by NODE Architecture & Urbanism into a recreational space, a spacious public park situated above an enormous two-storey wastewater treatment plant. The olfactory experience should also prove as convincing.

The second Special Prize winning project in Timisoara, Romania, was a temporary urban intervention for the European Capital of Culture 2023. It involved the cultivation of 1,300 plants in a tree nursery. The plants were subsequently distributed throughout the city. This initiative not only showcased the potential of urban greenery but also ensured the optimal use of resources. We believe this was an effective way to highlight the importance of green public spaces.

Munich's Werksviertel, awarded the third Special Prize, developed by Steidle Architekten, has become a role model as well. Traces of the site's earlier industrial past were allowed here; some of the halls that were no longer needed were left standing and structurally supplemented. Both past and new influences in urban development are visible. Before the conversion, the district had been used as a cultural center for more than ten years, making it a well-known location. The uses are mixed – offices, restaurants, apartments and hotels, artist studios and galleries, start-ups, schools, as well as sports facilities such as a climbing hall in a former silo.

The future of our urban centers will be shaped by several key factors, including diverse mixed-use developments, the conversion of abandoned or neglected neighborhoods, greenery and water infiltration areas to combat the urban heat, and sports and leisure facilities. These elements represent important answers to the questions about the future of urban coexistence. I believe these four winning schemes can serve as real role models for the transformation of our cities.

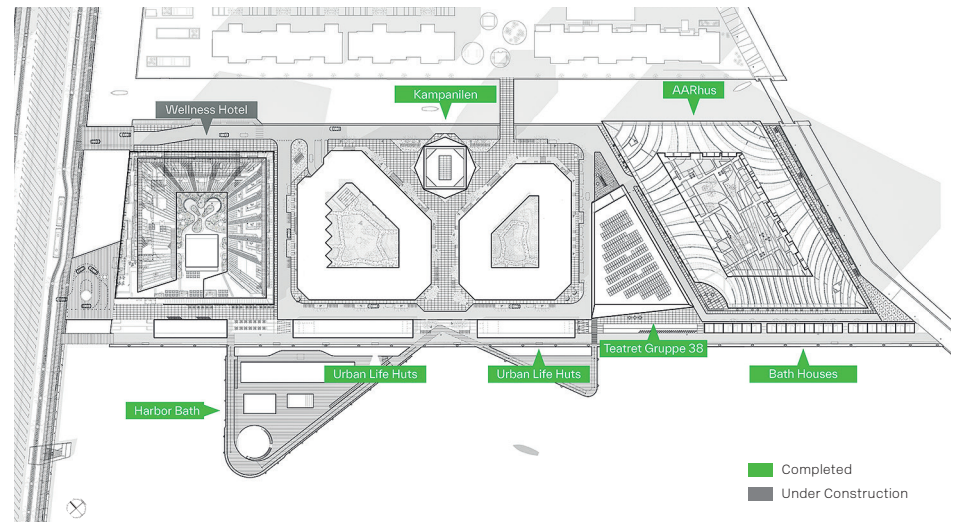
Award Ceremony at the BAU Congress China in Shanghai, October 2024. Jury member LI Cundong and First Prize recipient Shu Susan Du from BIG Shenzhen. Foto: CADE



First Prize

Aarhus Harbor Masterplan

Bjarke Ingels Group, Copenhagen



In 2013, BIG was tasked with the conversion of a former industrial port into a vibrant neighborhood on the waterfront of Aarhus, Denmark. Together with Gehl Architects, BIG first designed the public spaces and then turned what was left into plots for commercial and residential development. Today, a public promenade runs the length of the waterfront, connecting the bay to the east with a marina to the west. Its meandering form zigzags across the pier, defining a series of new public spaces on land and water. With its combination of different functions, including housing, business, culture, and leisure, the 52,000-square-meter masterplan creates a new urban area where public and private realms converge.

Similar to BIG's first harbor bath in Copenhagen, the Aarhus Harbor Bath provides new ways for the public to enjoy the water all year round,

featuring three different types of swimming pool and two saunas. A series of Urban Life Huts further enlivens the waterfront, housing restaurants and cafés, in addition to 21 privately owned beach huts. These nevertheless open their doors ten times a year to community-led initiatives such as Christmas markets, social dinners, and yoga classes. On the far side of the promenade, the theater, "Teatret Gruppe 38," attracts both locals and visitors with performances, cultural events, workshops, and block parties. Residential developments, including Aarhus Residences, Kampanilen and SLETH's Karréerne, are spread throughout the area, offering a mix of scale and typologies, from apartment blocks to courtyard buildings. The spaces have been optimized to ensure a comfortable atmosphere in the public areas between the built environments.

BIG

BIG's development of the waterfront at Bassin 7 with its promenade, harbour bath, cafés and vibrant urban life is the most popular area in the new district of Aarhus Ø.

Fotos: Laurian Ghinitoiu, plan in scale 1:3333



Special Prize

Shenzhen Lotus Water Culture Base

NODE Architecture & Urbanism, Shenzhen

The water purification station is located at the northern end of Honghu Park in the Luohu District of Shenzhen, south of Nigang East Road and east of Buji River. Foto: ZHANG Chao, Plan in scale 1:3333



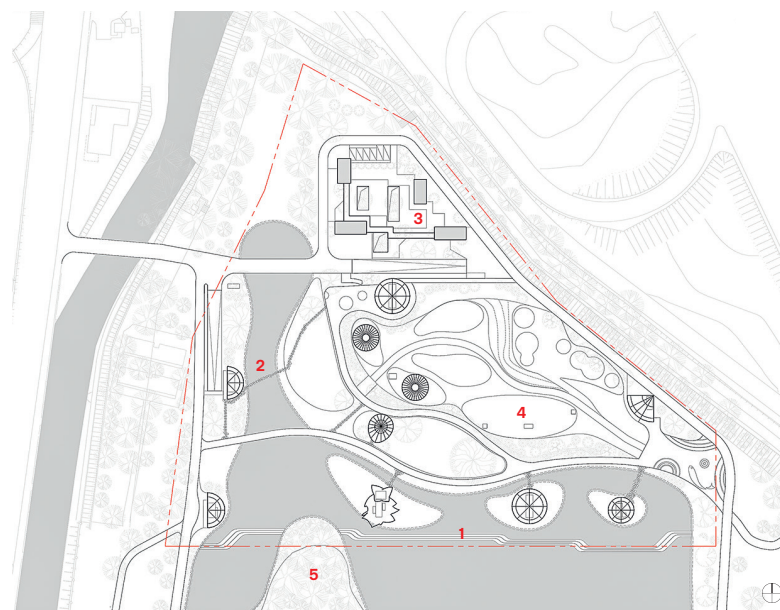
To address the city's increasing population and deteriorating waterways, the city government of Shenzhen added a new water purification station in Honghu Park, a major green area in the densely populated Luohu District. The project aims to restore the park's original water environment and improve the landscape as well as the spatial quality.

Faced with the complexities of sewage treatment, flood control, and underground construction work, as well as the diverse needs of the nearby community and park management, NODE Architecture & Urbanism conducted thorough research into the production processes and technical logic behind the landscape and design. To make the best use of the available resources, processes and contents were shared and communicated with the community whenever possible, making those effective elements in public spaces and landscapes.

Treated groundwater now replenishes the park's lake, while structures resulting from underground works, such as ventilation shafts, have been creatively repurposed into public art and observation areas. These transformations have made the water purification station into a new landmark and an active public space in Honghu Park.

By going beyond conventional principles of infrastructure engineering, the multi-dimensional design has created a community-friendly and ecologically sustainable area that is open to the public experience. It has reimagined a cold, utilitarian water purification facility, turning it instead into an engaging, human-centered urban space and public landscape that redefines the infrastructure from both a spiritual and an architectural perspective. Given the limited space in the city of Shenzhen, the project highlights new possibilities for the mixed public use of infrastructure sites.

NODE Architecture & Urbanism



- 1 Waterfront experience
- 2 Ecological wetland
- 3 Offices
- 4 Lotus nursery area
- 5 Bird island

Special Prize

1306 Plants for Timisoara

MAIO, Barcelona



As part of the program for Timisoara: European Capital of Culture 2023, a temporary installation “The Nursery: 1,306 Plants for Timisoara” was placed at the Victory Square in Timisoara’s city center. The project consisted of an ephemeral structure housing a tree nursery and open spaces for public activities. The landscape architecture office Studio Peisaj added contextual knowledge about local species as well as culturally specific horticulture traditions. The nursery contained various types of greenery, from perennial trees, shrubs, and flowering plants to annual species that were produced in community gardens or at horticultural research and higher education institutions in Timisoara. The installation functioned mainly as an event venue and an alternative outdoor arena for small-scale cultural activities such as gardening workshops, micro-exhibitions, and guided tours. It also provided the backdrop for sound and movement performances. Apart from its symbolic significance as an important milestone, the nursery project aimed to host and encourage activities by merging the natural environment with the domestic.

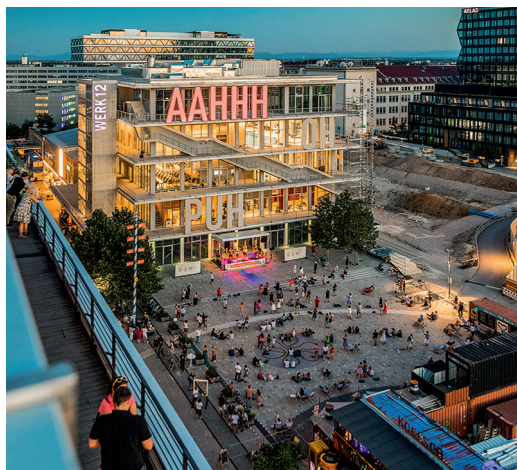
The project is intended as an invitation to redefine and enhance the use of public space and its relationship to greenery, and can also be seen as a testing ground for the use, design, and perception of shared spaces. With the area’s ongoing urban transformation in mind, the proposal opened up new ideas and discussions about further uses, taking into account city temporalities and engagement with other communities and institutions. After its closing, all of the nursery trees and plants were distributed throughout the city, in line with the desire from residents for new green spaces and following a reuse logic. **MAIO**

The Victory Square in Timisoara is normally not used much for leisure activities. The temporary installation invited passers-by to stop.
Foto: Laurian Ghinitoiu

Special Prize

Werksviertel, Munich

Steidle Architekten, Munich



Werksviertel is located at the site of the former Pfanni factory, which was abandoned in 1996. This new urban quarter has transformed the previously industrial setting into an independent mixed-use district, providing space for residential, commercial, social, and cultural activities, including open public areas for events and other forms of entertainment. It connects to the heart of Munich through the Ostbahnhof to the north, the Kusterman Park to the west, the residential area to the south, and the commercial belt to the east.

The preservation of industrial buildings and the existing uses was a prerequisite. Werksviertel incorporates the vitality and complexity of the existing development and harnesses its positive potential into the new quarter. The existing functions are being gradually cultivated, consolidated, and updated, while new developments are emerging at the same time.

By simultaneously densifying and creating open spaces, a wide variety of functions could be brought together. Today, the old stands side-by-side with the new: business suits next to overalls, punk next to classical music, 5-star hotels next to backpacker hostels, schools next to wholesale retailers, and kindergarten next to nightclub. The architectural focus – a joint effort between several European studios – lies solidly on urban diversity, event space and programmatic innovation.

The foundation of Werksviertel rests on its economic sustainability, which has been achieved by managing existing buildings efficiently and accommodating a variety of new tenants. The careful addition of previously non-existent spaces, such as hotels, retail spaces, fitness centers, offices, and apartments ensures a wide selection of activities to meet most urban demands and creates a distinctive macroeconomic composition. **Steidle Architekten**

The high degree of diversity in Werksviertel is particularly evident in the enthusiastic use of the public areas.

Foto: URKERN/Ivana Bilz



China Merchants Group History Museum, Shenzhen

Urbanus, Shenzhen

The China Merchants Group History Museum was built to celebrate the China Merchants Group's 150th anniversary and the historic economic boom in both Shenzhen and China as a whole. The sculptured mountain path leading up to the museum acts as a timeline, and the museum building blends monumentally into its natural surroundings. The main exhibition spaces are located on the first, second, and fourth floors. The elevated third floor contains a publicly accessible, 360-degree viewing platform (Foto: TAL).



Ilulissat Icefjord Centre, Ilulissat

Dorte Mandrup, Copenhagen

Against a harsh, beautiful Arctic backdrop, the Ilulissat Icefjord Centre simultaneously highlights the cultural heritage of this ancient frontier and sheds light on the effects of climate change that are taking place at the edge of the UNESCO-protected Greenland wilderness. Overlooking the Kangia Icefjord on the west coast of Greenland, 250 kilometers north of the Arctic Circle, the building blends into the terrain. The Centre offers a vantage point from which to experience the Icefjord and better understand the consequences of climate change on this particular landscape (Foto: Adam Mørk).



Living at Verna-Park, Rüsselsheim on the Main

Baur & Latsch Architekten, Munich

Verna-Park is made up of seven buildings that have been integrated into the urban fabric in the centre of Rüsselsheim. Located on a former brownfield, the development provides small flats for individuals and students, barrier-free flats for senior citizens, family flats and shared flats in mixed array throughout the entire complex. The project aims to perpetuate a sense of local identity by merging characteristics of existing buildings into the new buildings. The pattern of demarcated private and public areas has been dissolved in favor of a more open structure (Foto: Sebastian Schels).



PMU Tuxtla, Tuxtla Gutiérrez

RZERO estudio, Mexico City

In Mexico, rapid urban growth often disrupts planning, creates precarious environments and neglects vulnerable populations. Tuxtla Gutiérrez in Chiapas is facing disorganized growth, inequality, and segregation. The PMU Tuxtla's strategy is to rehabilitate neighborhoods through citizen-driven projects that improve connectivity, safety, and equality. Initiatives such as a plaza and a sports centre provide recreation, marketplaces, and walkways, thereby addressing local needs. Engaging local communities ensures inclusive public spaces that in turn lead to safer cities (Foto: Zaickz Moz).



Shenzhen Skypark, Shenzhen

Crossboundaries, Beijing

Shenzhen's rapid rise to a city of 17 million requires innovative urban solutions. The Skypark project transforms the rooftop of the Metro Line 2's depot into a 1.2-kilometer-long, green recreational space, thus addressing the need for public infrastructure within the city. Skypark connects separate neighborhoods, provides sports and leisure opportunities, and offers views over the Shenzhen Bay. The park fosters inclusivity and revitalizes fragmented areas, showing how architecture can enrich city life by promoting accessibility, connectivity and functionality (Foto: BAI Yu).



Tainan Spring, Tainan

MVRDV, Rotterdam

Tainan Spring is a design for the public space that features the transformation of a former downtown shopping mall into an urban lagoon. Young plants surrounding the site will eventually grow into a lush jungle, reconnecting the city with both its waterfront and the natural environment. Commissioned by the Urban Development Bureau of the Tainan City Government, the masterplan rejuvenates a 'T-Axis' to the East of the Tainan Canal, creating a new landscape that connects the site of the former China Town Mall with a kilometer-long stretch of the city's Haian Road (Foto: Daria Scagliola).



Morland Mixité Capitale, Paris

David Chipperfield Architects, Berlin

The former Préfecture de Paris on Boulevard Morland was considered uninviting and introvert. As part of the „Réinventer Paris“-initiative it has been transformed into „La Félicité“ – a vibrant place of mixed use. New structures connect the boulevard to the Seine via arched arcades, opening up the space and making it more accessible. The redesign preserved the original building and added sustainable features. The complex includes housing, a hotel, offices, retail, a marketplace, and a childcare center. Its top floors boast an art venue, a bar, and a restaurant (Foto: Simon Menges).



New Aarhus School of Architecture, Aarhus

Adept, Copenhagen

Inspired by new learning principles, the school was designed to be an incubator for architectural experiments, workshop-based learning and synergies between students. The architecture itself is raw, resembling an industrial building. Located at the site of a former railway yard, the school merges traces of its industrial history to form a rough-hewn, authentic identity. Characterized by its use of exposed materials and industrial details, as well as the concentration of its volume toward the street, the building design opens up and adapts to this unkempt environment (Foto: Rasmus Hjortshøj).



The Main Pavilion of the 11th Jiangsu Horticultural EXPO, Nanjing

China Architecture Design & Research Group, Beijing

The pavilion transforms existing silos built on an abandoned cement factory site. It includes exhibition halls, a tourist center, commercial spaces, offices, and resorts, as well as a green public area. The design features terraced landscapes with a winding ramp for improved accessibility. The first floor has been converted into a commercial outdoor space that faces the street, and repurposed to offer open recreational areas and 24-hour facilities for visitors and staff (Foto: Hou Bowen).



Wilmina, Berlin

Grüntuch Ernst Architects, Berlin

A 19th-century building, previously listed as a courthouse and women's prison, now houses a hotel and a restaurant. The conversion blends historical preservation with modern revitalization; its design focuses on transforming the house from a space of isolation to a contemplative retreat. A new penthouse has been added, and former prison cells have been converted into hotel rooms with wider windows to let in more light. The former prison yard has given way to the restaurant, and a perennial garden and rooftop landscaping now enhance the courtyard (Foto: Wilmina).