



Ganit Mayslits, Udi Kassif

Tel Aviv Port Public Space Rejuvenation, Israel

The transformation of the once forgotten harbor reconnects Tel Aviv with the Mediterranean Sea. An undulating wooden platform creates an “urban living room”.

Occasionally, in the span of a city’s lifetime, an old and derelict part of it is re-discovered as a new center of attraction in the urban fabric. Such a rare moment, which happens once every decade or two, manifests a city’s rejuvenation, as a once forgotten place becomes a vivid part of urban life. Residents are drawn to this revitalized space and visitors come there to experience an urban icon. It revives the areas around it, surfaces constantly in the media and becomes a desired location for social events. Such transformations are the foundations on which cities reinvent themselves, not only physically but also symbolically, as the image of the city changes and will never be the same again.

The realization that the ever growing city of Tel Aviv needed a proper seaport led in 1936 to a decision to build a new harbor. The selected location was the Yarkon Estuary, north of the young city. No one imagined that the future would see the small city grow into a thriving metropolis and that the remote estuary would become the heart of a metropolitan area with a population of one million. Several years were needed to understand that the port did not live up to its expectations. It was too small and difficult to access from the sea. Its deterioration was

inevitable and by 1965 all commercial activities in the port had ceased, leaving the city with a neglected area for nearly half a century. The unique nature of the land made it the focus of dozens of plans suggesting massive real estate development and the construction of high-rise residential towers and corporate buildings. Plans, schemes and international competitions were proposed and entrepreneurs and architects came up with various visions for the site. Its potential, though suspended, was obvious, but for Tel Aviv’s residents it was a place to visit only if one was looking for ceramic tiles at bargain prices.

A pivotal occurrence in the port’s history took place in 2001 when Marine Trust Ltd. changed its management. A new generation of people, motivated by sustainability and a sociocultural perception took it upon themselves to navigate the port towards a brighter future. Shortly after, a new vision for the area, promoting it as a public space connecting the city fabric with its seafront, was compiled and a competition was announced. Instead of developing the area by new construction and real estate enterprise, a different agenda was put forward: re-using existing buildings and, more importantly, investing resources in the development of an open space for public use.



Topos, Germany

Tel Aviv Public Space Regeneration, July 2009



The new public space provides access to Tel Aviv's seafront. Mayslits Kassif Architects created a hybrid open space that combines the qualities of the informal beach environment with the texture of the city.

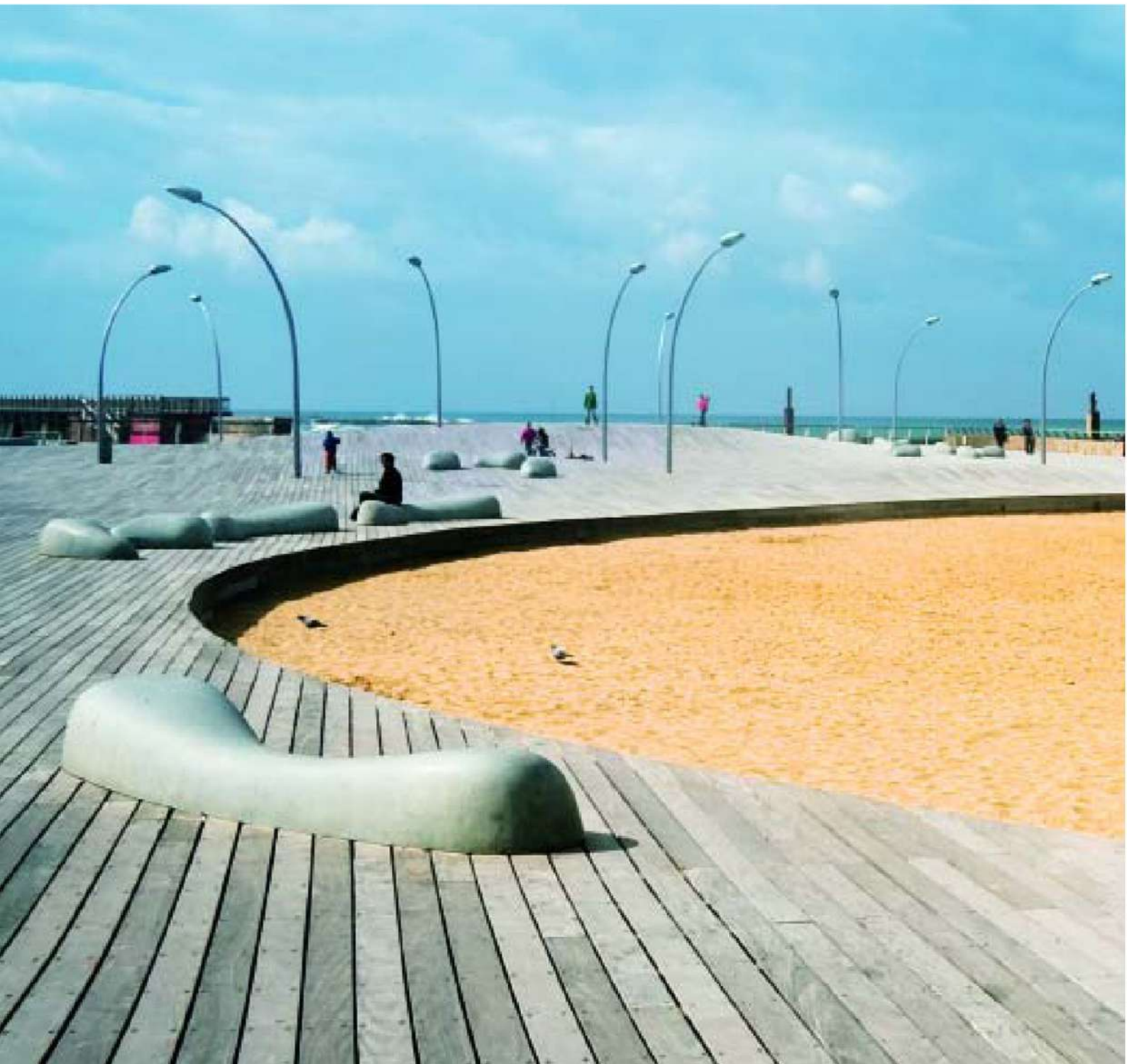


Topos, Germany

Tel Aviv Public Space Regeneration, July 2009



The sand dunes, on which Tel Aviv was built, were the inspiration to develop the wooden decks as an undulating, curvaceous surface. Elements like seating, lighting, parasols and beach chairs are positioned on the surface in an informal composition.





The public competition in 2003 to design the open spaces of the port proved to be a turning point for the port's future. In our winning proposal, together with architect Galila Yavin, we suggested a hybrid space that combines the qualities of the informal beach environment with the ever-present texture of the city. We hoped that the creation of a fresh, inspiring, abstract urban platform would act as a trigger for some new forms of urban and social culture.

Urban living room

The concept of the "urban living room" was developed as part of the attempt to challenge the clear gap between private and public spaces by developing a new agenda of hospitality. The team was searching for a "moving" urban moment, a moment that unites motion and emotion – an urban surface that enhances the visitors' sensations – where simplicity coexists with the open space and the city's edge meets the horizon.

In this "urban salon" we tried to achieve a new type of sphere for public expression. A space that is not bound to symbols of tradition, detached from hierarchy and order – a liminal space where patterns of behavior are created organically, as time progresses, and are in a constant state of change. It is a space that belongs to everyone and no one, equally.

Shortly after the first stages of the rejuvenated port were opened to the public, people from all walks of life gravitated to the new urban space, eager to experience the multitude of possibilities offered by the new relationship between the city and the Mediterranean Sea. Almost three million people visit the Tel Aviv Port every year, an unprecedented figure for a metropolitan population of one million residents and a country of seven million.

The large, open, undulating platform has become a host for anyone who wishes to be alone or in a crowd: to run, ride a bike, watch the sun

set and rise, get married, sunbathe, sit, stand, eat, practice yoga, go fishing, or just simply be there.

Material manifestation

The material manifestation of the project was persistently the focus of our attention. Our primary goal, in this aspect, was to create a vast wooden surface that would unify all parts of the port by using a material that encourages contact and intimacy. Our second goal was to create a distinctive, yet subtle, vocabulary that maintains the values we wished to achieve: a lack of hierarchy, a sensual materiality and a clear level of abstraction in all of the project's elements. Standard "off-the-shelf" products were found unsuitable and a new set of words and elements was conceived:

Dunes. Inspired by the sand dunes on which Tel Aviv was built, we proposed the wooden decks as an undulating, curvaceous surface. In the move from computer modeling to real life, we used small scale models made of balsa wood to explore the way in which the planks would be placed and bent, but we quickly decided to build a life-size model on site to test all aspects of the design and technology. This model proved a nice surprise: in its actual size, the wood turned out to be rather flexible and its performance exceeded our expectations, which gave us the confidence to start constructing the 14,000 square meters of dune-scape decking.

Boolboos pebbles. The unique nature of the wooden texture made it possible to think of it not only as a walking platform but also as a sitting and lounging surface. Therefore, we designed abstract rounded objects named "Boolboos" out of molded Glass Reinforced Concrete (GRC). The large pebbles turned into playful objects, open to various interactions such as sitting, leaning, sliding and sometimes even hugging.

Soof lights. To avoid any structured and geometrical space arrangements, the lighting features were designed as tall canes and scattered all



TEL AVIV PORT PUBLIC SPACE REGENERATION, TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

Client: MarineTrust Ltd.

Architects: Mayslits Kassif Architects, Tel Aviv; design team: Ganit Mayslits,

Udi Kassif, Galila Yavin, Oren Ben Avraham, Maor Royzman, Michal Ilan

Competition: 2003, Mayslits Kassif Architects with Architect Galila Yavin

Completion: 2008

Costs: 4 million euros

Area: 55,000 square meters



around the surface without any specific orientation, as if their composition was affected by the wind itself. The unique "field like" spatial arrangement created a distinctive silhouette to the port area. Low intensity lighting was chosen to maintain the subtle balance between light and dark, between nature and city.

Carpets. The parking areas function as multi-purpose zones, and the desire to make the entire port into a "hosting surface" led to the decision to name these areas "carpets". The polyurethane carpets were designed as huge graphic patterns, which mark and designate the parking areas not only for parking but also for large events, such as markets and festivals.

Parasols. Drawing from the beach culture, it was only natural to import some of the beach experience into the deck surface. One of the characteristics of the beach is the freedom to relax wherever one chooses simply by placing a parasol in the sand. Accordingly, the entire deck is designed as an "intelligent surface" with hidden anchors that accommodate parasols across its surface. In summertime, beach chairs and parasols are placed throughout the deck, offering the general public free seating and shade.

The project's success has instigated a new set of public space projects along Tel Aviv's shoreline, binding the city and its waterfront. Historical seafront blockades are now being removed with a series of projects offering city dwellers the option of uninterrupted free motion along the metropolitan shoreline. Along with its regeneration, the port is gradually becoming a host to various spontaneous organizations, artistic endeavors, public petitions and diverse acts of solidarity, from public weddings to clear water campaigns. These spontaneous events, more than anything, are signs for us that the port area is more than another collective public space. As we had hoped for and aspired to, it has become not only a public space but, more importantly, a vital public sphere.



Page 42: The restoration of Tel Aviv Port acted as a trigger for new public space projects along the coast. The parking areas function as multipurpose zones, serving also for events such as markets and festivals. Huge graphic patterns mark the so-called 'carpets' (below).

