

'scape, The Netherlands

Tel Aviv Public Space Regeneration, July 2011



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Photo: Daniele Orving

New shore area in Tel Aviv.

thinking on urban planning practice After all, in these times of recession it's natural that small, relatively cheap solutions with a big impact are sought.

An example: the architects Hernandez and Casanova are currently doing research on Public Space Acupuncture, funded by the Netherlands Architecture Fund. In a number of cities in Europe – including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Zaragoza and Hamburg – they are examining small and specific interventions in the public space that are examples of this strategy.



Photo: Harry Harzema

NDSM shipyard in Amsterdam.

And via the Rotterdam Architecture Biennial on the 'Open City' (2009), organized by Kees Christiaanse, we arrive at the European Urban Catalyst project (started in 2001) and the German landscape architect Klaus Overmeyer, whose insights are to be found in many projects in his home country, for example in Berlin, and whose book 'Planning the Unplanned' will be published soon. Acupuncture is not merely the 'small intervention'; it is also bound up with a broader stream of thinking on urban and landscape planning – that it is impossible in this day and age to create a city in the old modernist planning tradition of a static, hierarchically organized top-down approach, where the focus is on achieving a final image. The new city is about fragments and change, about creating conditions and planning from the bottom-up. The 'open source urbanism' that Klaus Overmeyer champions seeks ways to develop activities and programme. The traditional step of translating this programme into spatial claims and form is a logical consequence, but no more than that. And aesthetics is barely considered at all.

In this edition of 'scape, Casanova and Hernandez describe the first results of their research and Mathilde Peen examines Overmeyer's work in detail. They compare the development of the old airfield in Berlin, Tempelhofer Feld, with that of the NDSM wharf in Amsterdam. The latter has become a hotbed for culture and art, and a pioneering example of the development of a previously derelict area.

'scape editor Cathelijne Nuijsink visited Alejandro Aravena in Chile, where his office Elemental has been working for many years with a limited budget, seeking forms of planning and urban development

that are appropriate to the country. Time and again it becomes clear that infrastructure and public space are the keys to improving cities and the urban environment, not only in Chile, but also in Germany, Switzerland and many other countries.

One of the first steps to revitalizing the old Berlin airfield has been the construction of ring, where people can exercise, but also to link up activities and provide orientation. And in Santiago Aravena hopes that by laying new paths – some of them raised – the city will be opened up and connected to the parks and surroundings, above the seized-up in infrastructure of the automobile.

Looked at it this way, this acupuncture is not about the locations but much more about the meridians, and about clearing up blockages. As indeed Bureau ZUS suggested at the Rotterdam Architecture Biennial for the Hoboken area (the Hoboken Knot). The most important intervention was making a breach in the Westerzeedijk, which as a result brought several areas back into contact.

Urban planners and landscape architects will never be able to confine themselves to designing individual spaces though, as the bigger picture (and context and cohesion) is always present. But designing fragments is becoming increasingly important, and it is perhaps no coincidence that architects and spatially oriented artists in particular play a role in this form of urban planning. The other examples in this 'scape are evidence of this, especially the exciting project in Tel Aviv where architects Mayslits and Kassif have created a beautiful art square, without a tree in sight and no real road or path. It's a truly hybrid space, a smelting of architecture and spatial artistry, which

DOSSIER

Acupunctuur

Improving things by means of small, directed interventions. That's what we at 'scape think acupuncture is about. Acupuncture is good stuff. It's about knowledge, but also about a feeling for precision, craft and experience. Treatment in traditional Chinese medicine involves inserting needles at points along the meridians of the body. The method is based on the concepts of life energy (chi) and balance. Acupuncture appeals to the imagination and is easy to associate with urban planning and landscape architecture.

The term acupuncture was first mentioned years ago – when doubts arose about the Dutch government policies that had adopted a comprehensive approach to regional development in their attempts to beautify the landscape. It was Eric Luiten, at the time working for the nature conservation organization Staatsbosbeheer and now professor of Architecture and History at Delft University of Technology, who argued in favour of small but relevant interventions and their potential value: special projects, architectural jewels instead of structural

plans that never produced direct results. Of course, this required an understanding of the landscape in question and the ability to trace the meridians. But the conviction was there that this was possible. In urban planning there are the well-known examples by Jaime Lerner, mayor and city architect of Curitiba. His directed interventions have been impressive, and he has proved, mainly in the public space, that it is possible to make improvements to this city.

Acupuncture is not part of teaching curricula, but recently it has increasingly become an item in

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Panorama point at Kimmelsberg, Drenthe.



Park Fiction, Hamburg.

Photo: Mauricio Busamante



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has given the sea back to the city, and it's used for parties, sports and weddings. Another example: the open-air library in Magdeburg. The temporary lending library has metamorphosed into a fantastic meeting place. And here the town's inhabitants themselves were involved: it was their actions that brought about the 'library'.

There's a good reason for including one of landscape architect Berno Strootman's projects here. He designed about ten panorama points in the 'old' cultural landscapes of the Dutch province of Drenthe. These were not placed on just any old higher places,

but on particular nodes in the landscape, locations from which the landscape becomes 'legible'. A simple intervention in the surroundings increased the legibility and, with it, the beauty and meaning of the landscape was displayed to its full advantage. Without extensive understanding of that landscape, the panorama points would never have been designed in this way.

I beg to differ from Luiten's view at the time that landscape architects should confine themselves to incidental interventions. The Netherlands has a rich tradition for creating what we refer to as 'cultural landscapes'. This cultural heritage is not the result

of haphazard incidents, but of a persistent development vision that is based on cohesion and taking the long view, literally and metaphorically, in both time and space. A visitor to Hamburg is likely to be impressed by the composition of the city as a whole and the enormous decisiveness of top-down planning, first applied in the Speicherquartier (1866-1888) and now in the Hafencity. But the observant visitor will also notice the tiny neighbourhood park in St Pauli, a district that oozes with amusement arcades, the sex industry and gambling, where residents managed to conquer a small patch of green against the titans of government and developers. It is

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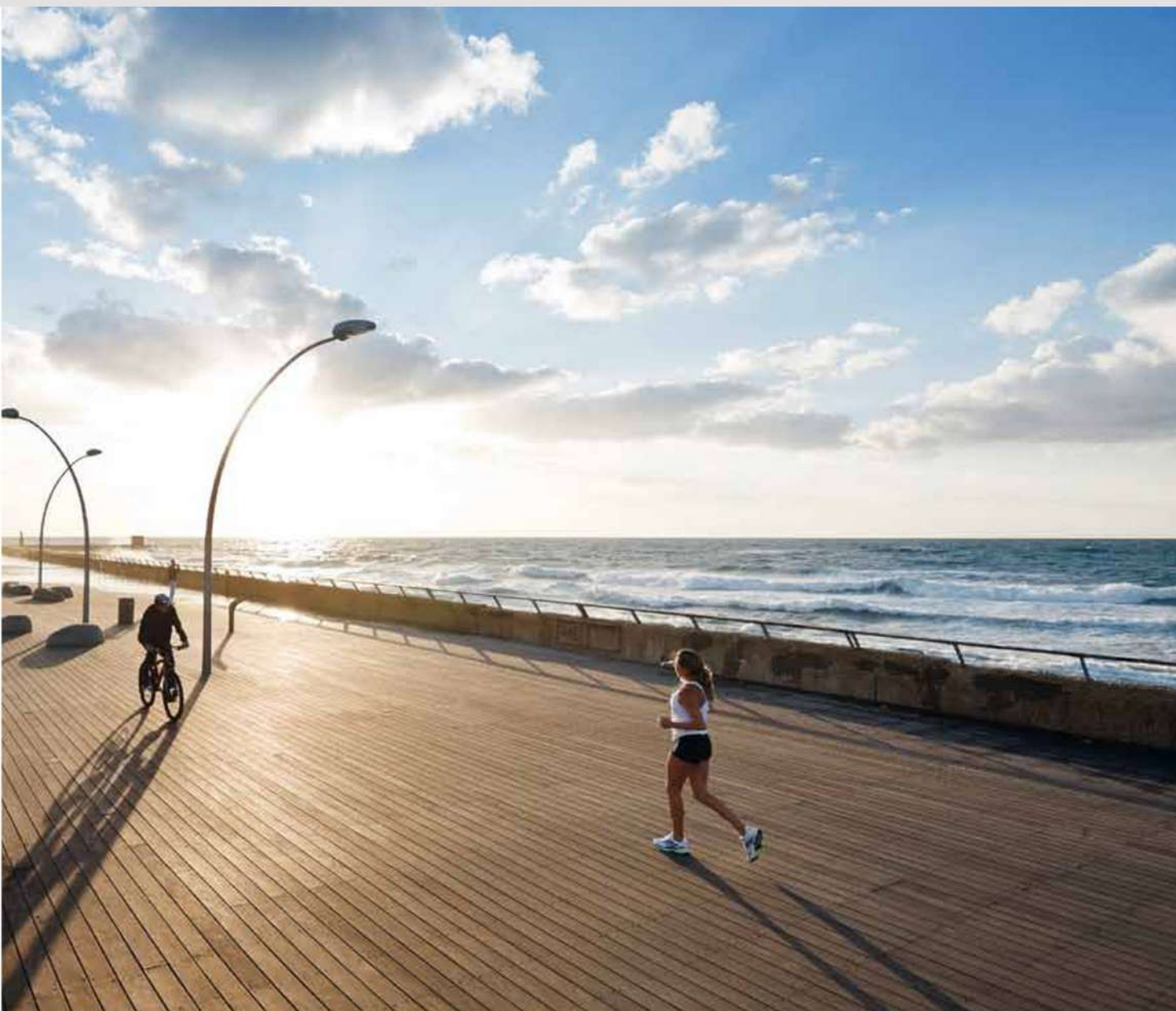


Photo: Ivan Baan

this sense of power and pleasure that appeals to the imagination and why we value these initiatives.

This edition of 'scape brings both of these, and we still can't get enough of them. The search is on for new roles and new positions. Reconnaissance and research have become equally important roles for landscape architects and urban planners as their traditional building role.

So perhaps we just need to keep studying, better and longer. After all acupuncture is already 2500 years old.

Harry Harsema

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buildings combined with an unusual approach to the public areas. The architects' idea was a hybrid 'urban living room', which would create a new atmosphere: open and accessible, non-hierarchical, and not burdened with symbols from the past. They envisaged a continuous, organic space that would inspire manifold uses by all members of society. They devised a floor made of Ipea wood, gently undulating, open in some places to show the sand below, which unifies the area. In some places the slopes echo those of the dunes. That the wood moves slightly when used increases the feeling of sensitivity that the material evokes.

Other materials used are simple, appropriate and tasteful. Large round boulders of GRC, detachable white beach like parasols and subtle lighting elements seem to have been strewn around randomly, but invite use and impart an air of informality. Cars are parked on 'carpets', which not only function as parking space, but also as a market place and space for festivals. They are decorated with striking graphic patterns.

The plan, acupuncture, as it were, performed with modest means, is a resounding success. The design not only reaped many awards - including the Rosa Barba prize at the Bienal for landscape architecture in Barcelona last year - the general public has also embraced the site. It attracts over three million visitors a year, who come to walk, sunbathe, skate, run, party, read, play and much more.

The success of the project has also influenced the thinking on further development of the area. Other locations along the coast are also being developed into public space so that the sea becomes better connected to urban areas, and the former port area has become an incubator for creative enterprise. It's been a long wait for Tel Aviv.

Harry Harsema



72 Hours of Urban Action

The '72-hour Urban Action Melbourne' project challenges teams to participate in a game plan competition that involves designing and constructing a site in response to a brief within 3 days. The initiators, RMIT University in Melbourne, are using temporary urban strategies to question the predictable landscapes of top-down-planned masterplans and instead go for the unexpected.

Why is the city of Melbourne interested in having such an event?

Rosalea Monacella (RMIT): 'We are a non-profit group of designers within the School of Architecture and Design. Called OUTF (Office of Urban Transformation Research), we see design practice as an agent of cultural, environmental and political change. Our group participated in the first '72-hour Urban Action' event in Israel in 2010. We thought it was important to set up a similar event in Melbourne so that the design of our public space is framed within the discourse of landscape urbanism. This event endeavours to influence how the city, state and national decision-makers approach the future of our urban environment.'

Why did you choose the docklands as the location for 72-hour Urban Action?

Monacella: 'The Melbourne docklands are still waiting for the completion of a new masterplan, and meanwhile public space remains relatively

inactive. As a result, the docklands are often felt to be missing an urban 'heart' - lacking social identity and a sense of place. Growth, change and adaptation, the qualities that describe a living city, have largely been ignored. It is these qualities that the '72-hour' hopes to change to create real space. The docklands site offers an opportunity for temporary design events by activating spaces in transit, vacant sites and unutilized urban landscapes.'

What do you expect these temporary small-scale events - created during the 72 hours - to contribute in the long term to the re-use of abandoned sites like the docklands?

Monacella: 'The ambition is to generate alternate ways of thinking about public space and our cities. The docklands, like many cities around the world, are now renewing themselves. It forms a perfect test case, and we hope that the event itself informs the way the docklands will grow over time.'

Cathelijne Nuijsink

The 72-hour Urban Action Melbourne will take place in Melbourne's docklands from 25-30 July 2011. Participants can submit an application form to 72hrmelbourne@outr.org.



Carpets with graphic design were made as a parking lot.

Photo: Adi Branda

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Areal view before and after.



A wooden deck, with pebbles and sand.

How the sea was returned to the city

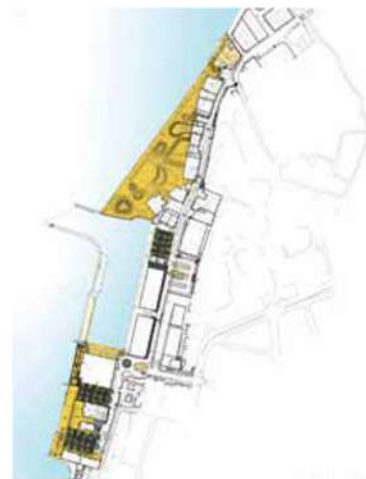
Tel Aviv built a new port in 1936, in the Yarkon estuary just north of the young city. At that time no one foresaw that the city would grow to a million inhabitants and that the remote estuary would in time become the centre of the metropolitan area. By 1965 the harbour had already outlived its usefulness – it was too small and difficult to reach. The area fell into disuse and was neglected for decades. The plans that were made, predictably

enough, were based on expensive residential accommodation and prestigious office developments: private, lots of it and high-rise. But somehow or other, none of the plans ever reached fruition. The hesitance of the local authorities to 'give away' this potentially important area to developers, which would mean cutting the city off from the sea, apparently prevailed.

What remained was a desolate area, until one of the parties involved

realized it was time to turn the tide and that first new life needed to be breathed into the immediate shore area. The competition held in 2003 for a public space design that would unite city and sea resulted in a clear winner: the architectural practice of husband and wife team Mayslits and Kassif teamed up with the architect Galila Yavin for the competition.

Their solution was not new construction, but reuse of the empty



Design for the harbour area by Mayslits Kassif Architects.

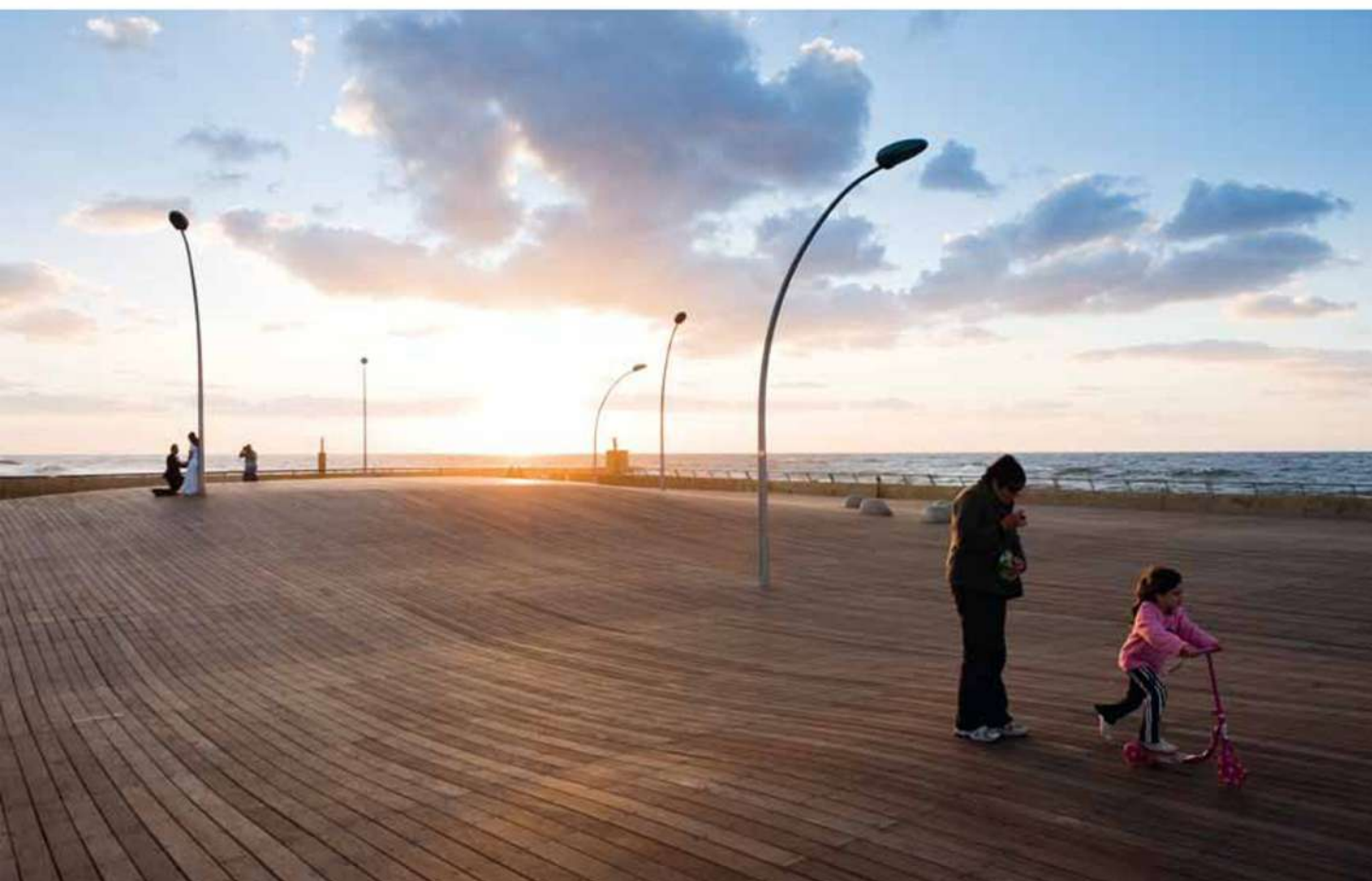


Photo: Ivan Baan