

In the public realm

Renée Davies attended the 51st IFLA World Congress 'Thinking and Action; Earth, Home and Landscape of Places', in Buenos Aires, Argentina and encountered a rich platform of ideas and inspiration.

Words and images by Renée Davies

The three-day International Federation of Landscape Architects World Congress held in Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina and home to just under three million people, provided a thought-provoking exploration of landscape architecture philosophies and how these manifest as actions on the ground.

The city itself was an exciting and appropriate venue for such a topic, given the huge challenges facing designers of open space in one of the world's so-called 'mega-cities'. It is a vibrant and complex port city located on the massive estuary of the Rio de la Plata. It is a city of contrasts with a vast array of intriguing and diverse barrios (neighbourhoods) and a fusion of cultures. The city is vast but at a more intimate level the individual barrio (there are 47 in total) are very walkable and to inhabitants of Buenos Aires (Portenos) are like their home towns.

The congress was held within the city's newest district and a recently developed public open space known as the Puerto Madero, a successful urban waterfront restoration project. Old brick industrial port buildings have been restored to house offices, shops, restaurants and a university, bringing a vibrancy to this once derelict area.

A day trip across the river from Buenos Aires to the ancient town of Colonia del Sacramento in Uruguay (founded in 1680) showcased some of the earliest urban forms still surviving, and the well-preserved urban landscape of the historic quarter (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) illustrates the fusion of Portuguese, Spanish and post-colonial styles and has a form that rejects the grid pattern imposed throughout South America by the Spanish. Instead, it reflects a plan founded in response to landscape features.

One of the most memorable presentations during the congress was delivered by Argentinian-born landscape architect Martin Rein-Cano (now working in Germany) who explored the role of migration in answering some of the social issues facing landscape architects' creation of identity in their work.

Martin challenged our notions of what public space should be and how to connect new migrants to the urban landscape through the example of his recently completed public park in Copenhagen – Superkilen.

He discussed how concepts around migration can help to produce answers to some of the social issues we face in modern cities, and how to gain a sense of identity in design.

He raised the important issue of how, in modern urban environments, there is a dissolution of borders with private becoming more public due to social media, and that public space therefore becomes more important as people bring what was once private into the public realm (his classic example is the iPhone and iPod being used in public spaces but makes you feel private). At Superkilen they explored this by creating a speaker system that people could connect their iPod to, making their music public.

An engaging talk by renowned Japanese landscape architect Fumiako Takano showcased a lifetime of work where community collaboration has been the focus, creating wonderfully magical landscapes for children and adults. Takano outlined his notion of 'landscape by deletion' – the idea that rather than creating through adding features and design installations, we can create beautiful and relevant spaces through the act of deletion. He showed examples of this with his project in Japan – the Tokachi Millenium Forest where the simple act of removal of dead branches, weeds and fallen logs within an overgrown forest allowed the penetration of light to the ground, and the following spring a flurry of woodland wildflowers previously dormant burst forth to change the entire aesthetic of the forest.

The congress also hosted the IFLA World Council meeting, which heralded a new era for IFLA. At the meeting, delegates from across the globe confirmed the amendments to the IFLA Constitution that support a fresh new approach to the structure and running of the organisation. The incoming executive committee will focus on implementing the new vision for IFLA, the success of which will involve strong, considered and cohesive leadership that allows delegates and regions to take ownership of, and relish, their new roles and responsibilities, and will increase the profile of IFLA at a global level as a dynamic, collaborative and action-based organisation. **15**

Upcoming congresses

For those interested in experiencing an IFLA congress, the following options are available in 2015:

- The 2015 World Congress will be held in St Petersburg, Russia on 10-12 June, with the theme of 'History of the Future'.
- The 2015 IFLA Asia Pacific Congress will be held in August 10,11,12 in Lombok, Indonesia with the theme of – 'Volcano and Mountainscape'.

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