



# BEAUTY AND THE BUILT LANDSCAPE

*Beauty and the Built Landscape Week*

**JUNE 16-21, 2025**

*International Urban Design Congress*

**JUNE 17-19, 2025**

## CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

### *Themes*

A half-century ago, the discipline of urban design was refounded through the teaching, research, and practice of such postwar figures as Eliel Saarinen, Christopher Tunnard, Gordon Cullen, Saverio Muratori, Kevin Lynch, M.R.G. Conzen, and Colin Rowe. Today, interest in urban design continues to grow among academics, scholars, practitioners, and administrators at all levels. The discipline has broadened its scope from its original focus on the design of human settlements to a much larger set of concerns, so that housing affordability and the dynamics of economics; land consumption; social marginalization; and sustainability, climate change, and other environmental issues have increasingly occupied centre stage.

This commendable engagement has brought with it negative consequences, however, because environmental and functional matters, rather than offering the discipline additional tools, seem, in fact, to be replacing the original goal of “beauty” in both research and practice within the discipline. The production of quality places for human life has become largely episodic. At the same time, it has become evident that many historic places admired for their beauty also hold valuable lessons for environmental and social sustainability while most new settlements keep showing a diffused disciplinary inability to build beautiful and hospitable living environments.

But there is little agreement among either advocates or critics of the movement to reintroduce beauty in urban design regarding terminology or precisely which values contribute to widely recognized beauty. Aesthetics itself is diluting its area of interest in response to the belief that everything gets to human beings directly or indirectly through the senses so that, for instance, pollution, weather instability, obesity, and social distress are now considered aesthetic concerns as well. According to this perspective, hedonic well-being should be satisfied by “ecological aesthetics” and we all should learn how to derive social, physiological, and psychological restoration from biologically sustainable environments and, ultimately, from a commitment to abstention. At the same time, new developments in neuroscience are calling into question conventional views about the inevitably subjective nature of beauty. Still, and possibly because of this situation, there is much to do to make our living environments more beautiful and facilitate the important contribution that aesthetic quality can provide to human health, well-being, and happiness.

### *Venue*

On June 16-21, 2025, the **City of Viterbo** will host a “Beauty and the Built Landscape” [BBL] week with various events planned besides the International Urban Design Congress: exhibitions, films, sightseeing tours that will take place in several historic sites of the city and its surroundings. The Congress is planned to be held on June 17-19, in Viterbo, Italy.

## *Sessions*

### **Session 1: The Watermarks of Beauty**, Coordinated by:

**Mark Alan Hewitt**, Mark Alan Hewitt Architects

**Steven W. Semes**, University of Notre Dame, Board of Directors, BBL

*What are we talking about when we talk of beauty in urban landscapes? What are its characteristics and where does it come from? Are there different types? Is it generally the product of single artists or of collective involvement? Is it innate and culturally universal or the property of diverse cultures? We begin with a brief overview of some central questions.*

### **Session 2: Beauty and Organized Complexity**, Coordinated by:

**Stefano Cozzolino**, Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development, Dortmund, Scientific Committee, BBL

**Stefano Moroni**, Politecnico di Milano, Board of Directors, BBL

*Urban beauty has traditionally been thought to be “a work of art”. However, authors engaging with complexity theories, such as Jane Jacobs and Christopher Alexander, have challenged this assumption, emphasising the generative power of urban life and emergent living structures. Where does the contemporary debate stand today?*

### **Session 3: Inhabiting Beauty: Urban and Social Aspects of Environmental Aesthetic Quality**, Coordinated by:

**Claudia Mattogno**, Chair, Scientific Committee, BBL

**Marichela Sepe**, Coordinator GUD, Sapienza Università di Roma, Board of Directors, BBL

*By focusing on the role of beauty in the design and experience of public spaces, the session will explore how elements such as form, materials, textures, and colours shape the way people perceive and interact with their surroundings. Participants are encouraged to consider how beauty can elevate the functionality of public spaces, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose while promoting active and inclusive engagement with urban life. Both theoretical and empirical contributions are welcomed.*

### **Session 4: Beauty and Culture: Lifestyle, Building Types, Historical Towns and Vernacular Architecture**, Coordinated by:

**Wòwò Dīng**, Nanjing University, ISUF, Director, Urban Design Dept for Historical and Cultural City Committee, Chinese Society of Urban Studies, Board of Directors, BBL

**Jǐnxī Chén**, Tsinghua University, Scientific Committee, BBL

*Beauty and culture are inseparable in determining the aesthetic qualities of cities. There is no absolute beauty, and different cultures create the beauty of different cities. The aesthetic quality of historic centres, traditional and vernacular settlements, cases and methods of regeneration are discussed with a cosmopolitan attitude.*

### **Session 5: Beauty and Liberty**, Coordinated by:

**Stefano Cozzolino**, Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development, Dortmund, Scientific Committee, BBL

**Stefano Moroni**, Politecnico di Milano, Board of Directors, BBL

*Harmony and order are two conceptual pillars of beauty, often operationalised through stringent, highly prescriptive regulatory frameworks that can stifle individual design creativity and freedom. As observed by Marco Romano, among others, this approach can have significant negative repercussions. What should the role of regulation be?*

## Call for abstracts and projects

The Congress will be dedicated to an exchange of ideas on the foundational morphological and aesthetic aspects of urban design. There will be invited speakers and speakers selected by a call for abstracts (theory contributions) and for projects (design contributions).

We expect both senior and junior participants. **Attendance to the Congress is free** and open to all interested, in person and online, upon registration. Active participation will be in person and open to scholars and practitioners.

Participants will be selected on the basis of their contribution to the combination of the two focuses of the Congress, that is for 1) evidence and relevance of the aesthetic intent and 2) urban design scale and nature of the inquiry or project.

All contributions are meant to be developed in the months after the Congress and collected in a publication of proceedings.

A wide range of topics is welcomed, broadly referring to the topics treated in the sessions. The only discriminating criteria are their dealing with Beauty and Urban Design in their combination. Therefore, we are interested in theory contributions dealing with aesthetics, morphology, phenomenology, experimental psychology applied to the aesthetics of the built environment and in projects using design strategies or regulations explicitly addressing the aesthetic matter *stricto sensu*.

## Schedule and deadlines of the call

**March 31<sup>st</sup>:** Scholars and practitioners interested in actively participating to the Congress are invited to send to [bbl@comune.viterbo.it](mailto:bbl@comune.viterbo.it):

- a proposal in pdf format, English language, with title and 100 words max description of a presentation to be offered during the congress regarding an essay or a project description, including a selection of meaningful visuals (3 max).
- a short CV (100 words max).

Role of aesthetic matters and nature, scale of the object of inquiry should be made clear and report the session they refer to. (March 31<sup>st</sup> is deadline for the full consideration. Late deliveries might be considered too, if time and space allow).

**April 14<sup>th</sup>:** Contributions acceptance is communicated to participants. Reviewers might suggest/require changes.

**May 19<sup>th</sup>:** Delivery of complete draft with outline of essay or project presentation. Documents should include a description 1,000 words max, and draft PPT presentation in PDF format.

**June 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Final delivery

**January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026.** The final version of the selected contributions are expected to be delivered for publication.



### HOSTING INSTITUTIONS

Provincia di Viterbo; Città di Viterbo; Ordine degli Architetti P.P.C. di Viterbo e provincia; Diocesi di Viterbo.

### MAIN ACADEMIC PARTNERS

Nanjing University, School of Architecture and Urban Planning; Tsinghua University, School of Architecture; University of Maryland, School of Architecture, Planning & Preservation-Architecture Program; University of Notre Dame, School of Architecture.

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Scientific coordination: Antonio Pietro Latini  
Organizational coordination: Danilo Pasquini

*As the June 2024 Preparatory Seminar, also the June 2025 Congress is a "no-budget" event. Neither organizers nor presenters are paid for their activities. Attendance, in presence or online, is open and free for all interested. Only selected logistic costs are covered by institutional and private sponsors.*

*The Congress has the goal of encouraging all interested to meet in person. Therefore, while attending by remote will be possible upon registration, active participation will generally be in person. In consideration of the broad attendance expected, to cover travel and accommodation costs we must heavily rely on the originating institutions to provide support, when available.*