

INCLUSIVE CITIES AND REGIONS *TERRITOIRES INCLUSIFS*

14° Biennale of European Towns and Town Planners, Naples

Edited by
Marichela Sepe

#Special Workshop



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Contents

Foreword

- 1** *Inclusive Places and People*

Introductions

- 3** The policies of inclusion and the advocacy of urban civilization
Michele Talia
- 5** Inclusion dilemmas
Francesco Domenico Moccia
- 7** From Migration and Inclusion to Inclusive cities and Regions
Giuseppe De Luca

Keynote speeches

- 9** Inclusivity in an adaptive planning system
Janet Askew
- 11** ECTP-CEU's vision on inclusive cities and regions – territoires inclusifs
Markus Hedorfer
- 13** Regulatory Inclusiveness and Territorial equipment
Carolina Giaimo
- 15** Regional strategies for territorial cohesion (OP 5. Europe closer to citizens)
Bruno Discepolo
- 18** Social housing and benefits in Austria: an approach in creating inclusive and just settlements
Gerhard Vittinghoff
- 19** HOUSING CRISIS – after 1980's settlements reconversion and 2024 simplification
João Teixeira

Copia omaggio autori

I PART - Parallel Workshops

- 21** 1. Regional issues and regional disparity
- 81** 2. Metropolitan or city proposals
- 115** 3. Urban regeneration and Public Spaces
- 331** 4. Migration and cultural inclusion
- 357** 5. Cultural heritage
- 425** 6. Resilience and adaptation
- 511** 7. New economic approaches, such as the circular economy
- 525** 8. IT and the use of artificial intelligence in planning
- 561** 9. Ports, airports and other infrastructures
- 585** 10. Underground space

II PART - Special Workshops

- 599** About Spatial Inclusivity. A perspective from URBInLAB, Lisbon
- 611** Enhancing urban regeneration and spatial justice with Nature-Based Solution
- 637** Inclusive public spaces for water cities facing climate change
- 661** "Italian UNESCO Chairs' vision and actions
- 673** A Transdisciplinary Approach to Placemaking and Inclusivity: COST Action Dynamics of Placemaking
- 687** Inclusive city Ecosystems
- 699** Youthbanism: for a New Generation of Urbanistsz
- 705** Fragile geographies.
- 727** Green Oasis for the 15 minutes city model
- 747** Making/unmaking urban circular economies with 'otherness'
- 761** Public space for inclusive cities: the Biennial of Public Space
- 779** Universal accessibility and university education, the knowledge network
- 791** Findings and Evidences from the PNRR project RETURN
- 807** River Contracts as voluntary and negotiated planning tools

II PART

Special Workshops

ABOUT SPATIAL INCLUSIVITY. A PERSPECTIVE FROM URBINLAB, LISBON

Coordinator: Alessia Allegri

- 600** Intermittent City: Temporary uses and sharing practices to foster spatial inclusivity in urban spaces
Alessia Allegri, Rita Ochoa
- 602** Lisbon Metropolitan Area Public Spaces Atlas. An overview
Ana Beja da Costa
- 604** Towards a more inclusive and complex construction of Lisbon's metropolitan retail morphology?
Pedro Bento, Alessia Allegri
- 606** Towards inclusive water management practices
Maria Matos Silva
- 608** Public Space as a tool for metropolitan cohesion? Learning from Lisbon
João Rafael Santos

Special Workshops

ENHANCING URBAN REGENERATION AND SPATIAL JUSTICE WITH NATURE-BASED SOLUTION

Coordinators: Daniele La Rosa, Marialuce Stanganelli, Michele Grimaldi

- 612** NbS and Social cohesion: the CLEVER Cities experience. Russoli's Towers and Giambellino Park 129
Emilia Barone, Chiara Desiderio, Myriam Lunghini
- 614** Nature-based solutions for improving efficiency in urban settlements. A model for its measurement
Federica Cicalese, Isidoro Fasolino
- 616** Nature-Based Solution for Enhancing Climate Resilience. Sustainable Urban Regeneration for Barcellona 11@ Innovation District
Martina Di Palma

- 618** Orienting budget allocation for multifunctional. Nature-based Solutions in Italian metropolitan cities
Elena Di Pirro, Marco Marchetti, Bruno Lasserre
- 620** NBS as a pragmatic tool for disaster management cycle in earthquake risk. Critical issues and opportunities in the planning of emergency housing areas in Italy
Maria Sole Benigni, Chiara Catalano, Margherita Giuffrè
- 622** Knowledge and experience of NBS for urban issues. A literature review
Alessandra Marra, Michele Grimaldi
- 624** Nature-Based Solutions in historic centres: an exploration of current knowledge
Giulia Jelo
- 626** The strategic role of urban policies for urban biodiversity
Annarita Lapenna, Maria Chiara Pastore
- 628** From practice to definitions. A NBS standardization comprehensive governance framework
Laura Passatore, Sara Di Lonardo, Pasquale Capezzuto, Giacomo Riccio, Elisabetta Salvatori, Francesca Bretzel
- 630** A Distributive Environmental Justice Index for supporting the prioritisation of Nature-based. Solutions in Urban Greening Plans
Jarumi Kato-Huerta, Chiara Cortinovi, Chiara Parretta, Davide Geneletti
- 632** Economic feasibility of NBS project in urban context
A preliminary evidence from the city of Milan
Francesca Torrieri, Alessandra Oppio, Giulia Datola and Giulia Tarantino
- 634** Mapping susceptibility to climate change effects and to spatial inequality for NBS planning and design
Marialuce Stanganelli, Carlo Gerundo
- 636** Quantifying the benefits and spatial equity of Nature-based solutions in urban contexts
Nicoletta Denaro, Daniele La Rosa

Copia omaggio autori

Special Workshops

INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACES FOR WATER CITIES FACING CLIMATE CHANGE

Coordinators: Tullia Valeria Di Giacomo, Giulia Luciani, Pedro Ressano Garcia

- 638** Enhancing Urban Planning with Geographic Information System and Remote Sensing: A Case Study of Gdansk City, Poland, for Multi-functional Green and Blue Infrastructure Suitability Map
Hussein Annan, Lucyna Nyka
- 640** Towards an Inclusive and Resilient Flood Protection Planning: A Comprehensive Review of the InVEST's Urban Flood Risk Mitigation Model, Research Trends and Future Directions
Anahita Azadgar, Lucyna Nyka
- 642** Ecological and interdisciplinary micro-narratives and micro-territorialities (art, architecture, urban sociology) in the public spaces of water cities facing climate change.
Isabel Barbas
- 644** Climate sensitive transformations for resilient and inclusive waterfront urban territories
Lucyna Nyka, Justyna Borucka, Jakub Szczepański
- 646** Temporary cultural interventions in urban public spaces: sustainable design approaches for resilient communities in climate sensitive areas
Natalia Chrysikou, Konstantinos Sakantamis
- 648** Rome waterfronts: Heritage, water landscapes and vulnerability. Searching new blue and green connections
Tullia Valeria Di Giacomo, Claudia Mattogno, Bruno Monardo
- 650** A roadmap proposal for the conservation of waterfront heritage against the impacts of climate change as a tool for sustainable development policy
Anna Rubczak, Elif Mihcioglu, Dorota Kamrowska-Zaluska
- 652** Building waterfront resilience through heritage planning. Research on European cities in transition
Giulia Luciani

- 654** Post-Military Architecture as Inherited Common Good. Considerations on decommissioned bunkers along Lisbon coastline facing climate emergency
Maria Rita Pais

- 656** From neglected natural areas to multi-use and climate resilient public spaces: transforming Thessaloniki's urban waterfront
Alkmini Paka, Paraskevi Tarani

- 658** Proposal for the integration of short-term flood water into the water supply system of urban vegetation
Eva Stache

Special Workshops

ITALIAN UNESCO CHAIRS' VISION AND ACTIONS

Coordinators: Natalina Carrà, Giovanna Marconi, Paola Raffa

- 662** The unacceptable instrumental use of urban planning to deny religious minorities the right to places of worship
Flavia Albanese, Giovanna Marconi
- 664** Regenerative processes and innovative experiential laboratories for forms of cultural inclusion
Natalina Carrà
- 666** Mediterranean landscapes in emergency: natural and social habitats
Debora Macrì
- 668** Ways of inhabiting shared places
Paola Raffa
- 670** Cultural heritage in danger. Digital tools for preservation
Maria Trombetta

Special Workshops

A TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO PLACEMAKING AND INCLUSIVITY: COST ACTION DYNAMICS OF PLACEMAKING

Coordinator: Ayse Ere

- 674** Soundscape Map: Listening and identity
Jose Luis Carles
- 676** Informal Placemaking: Social Inclusion and Practices of Art and Culture
Ayse Ere
- 678** Diverse Placemaking and Gender Inclusive Practices
Ramona Mihaila
- 680** Augmented Soundwalk as a Transversal Tool
Cristina Palmese
- 682** Inclusive placemaking for enhancement and protection of historical sites
Marichela Sepe
- 684** The Dynamics of Placemaking: a transdisciplinary COST project
Zsuzsa Varga

Special Workshops

INCLUSIVE CITY ECOSYSTEMS

Coordinator: Maria Somma

- 688** Incubators of bottom-up participation processes as support tool for urban planning
Irina Di Ruocco, Chiara Alesci, Valentina Grazioli
- 690** Make cities inclusive through proximity public spaces and local centralities. Comparing perspectives
Maria Teresa Lombardo, Francesca Paola Mondelli, Sharon Anna Somma
- 692** Gamifying & AI: A synergistic approach to inclusive and sustainable community planning
Nicole Pascucci

- 694** Urban food forests as emerging inclusive urban ecosystems. Insights from experiences in Sicily and California
Elisa Privitera

- 696** Community, Participation and Regeneration: the call for images “#eSeInveceFosse...? Imagine the public space”
Maria Somma, Giada Limongi, Gloria Toma

- 698** River Infrastructure, Territorial Regeneration and Disaster Risk Management
Giorgia Tucci, Giada Limongi, Sara Ferraro

Special Workshops

YOUTHBANISM: FOR A NEW GENERATION OF URBANISTS

Coordinator: Pietro Garau

- 700** Youthurbanism: Reviving Planning through the Eyes of the Very Young
Pietro Garau
- 702** Teaching Future Generations About the Landscape for Environmental Sustainability. Educational contributions for youth urbanism, from ordinary to extraordinary
Rosalba D’Onofrio, Giorgio Caprari, Roberta Cocci Grifoni, Piera Pellegrino, Ludovica Simionato, Elio Trusiani

Special Workshops

FRAGILE GEOGRAPHIES

Coordinators: Stefano Magaudda, Elena Paudice, Federica Rosso

- 706** A “modus operandi” for the Mid-Adriatic city climate adaptation
Rosalba D’Onofrio, Timothy Brownlee, Chiara Camaioni, Jonathan Cecchi, Simone Malavolta
- 708** Indicator-based analysis methodology on fragile areas The case of Zagarolo and Petrella Salto
Luana Di Lodovico, Federico Eugeni

Copia omaggio autori

- 710** Climate transition and EU projects in European cities on the Mediterranean shores: governance matters
Federica Di Pietrantonio, Stefano Magaudda
- 712** An experiment to reduce the abandonment of the hamlets of Castiglione del Lago
Andrea Iacomoni
- 714** Integrated Urban Climate Resilience: Dual Strategies for Mitigating Flood Risks and Urban Heat Island
Simona Manucci, Federica Rosso
- 716** Strategies and considerations to contrast the abandonment of inland areas
Elena Paudice
- 718** Strengthening INtegrated Urban climate Resilience in the Built Environment through multi-objective strategies and Citizens involvement: inURBECitizens project
Federica Rosso, Francesco Cappa, Marco Ferrero
- 720** Cultivating new biodiversity by resilient landscapes. Opportunities to be seized in the Salento delle Serre
Paolo Galuzzi, Elena Solero, Piergiorgio Vitillo
- 722** Embracing social and cultural Diversity in Eleusis: Exploring Possible Composite Tourism experiences After the ECOC 2021 title
Panagiota Tsolakaki, Sofia Avgerinou Kolonias
- 724** Civil Protection Plan for inner areas. The case of Oltrepò Pavese
Elisabetta Venco

Special Workshops

GREEN OASIS FOR THE 15 MINUTES CITY MODEL

Coordinator: Fabiola Fratini

- 728** Pathways towards nature-based climate shelters in school environments
Isabel Ruiz-Mallén, Mamen Artero Borrue, Filka Sekulova

- 730** Enhancing Inclusive Urban Spaces: An innovative co-creation methodology for and with autistic children
Raquel Colacios, Blanca Calvo
- 732** A Glimpse Into The World Of Urban Forests
Tullia Valeria Di Giacomo
- 734** Greening the 15-minute city: the Eco-Pedagogical Microforest challenge
Fabiola Fratini
- 736** The “Biophilia Hypothesis” as a Nature-based Solution
Costanza Majone
- 738** Rotterdam: the green agenda. Making the city greener and more climate adaptive
Miranda Nauta
- 740** Tiny Forests within the urban fabric
Bartolomeo Schirone, Livia Schirone, Samir Attia, Elisa Manzino, Barbara Beccaria, Fausto Pistoja
- 742** Evaluation of the benefits of contact with nature in children
Giulio Senes, Natalia Fumagalli
- 744** Spatial and social factors enabling a sustainable relationship with nature
Matteo Giusti
- 745** Democracy and the experience of nature
Simone Pollo

Special Workshops

MAKING/UNMAKING URBAN CIRCULAR ECONOMIES WITH ‘OTHERNESS’

Coordinators: Andrea Bortolotti, Dario Minervini, Giulia Caterina Verga

- 748** Closing the loop, opening up the labour market. Training, reskilling, and inclusion in Brussels circular construction enterprises
Jasmin Baumgartner, David Bassens, Niels De Temmerman

- 750** Re-opening the circle. Steps towards an epistemologically diverse circularity
Andrea Bortolotti, Dario Minervini
- 752** Planning and Designing Circularity and Socio-Ecological Transition in Europe and Beyond: Is Technical Neutrality Really a Thing?
Silvio Cristiano, Luca Tricarico
- 754** Hacking spaces and artifacts. Everyday practices of urban commoning in Piazza Garibaldi
Cristina Trey, Ramon Rispoli, Adam Arvidsson
- 756** How to support and develop (more) inclusive circularity-inspired urban projects and designs? A contribution on bottom-up initiatives for a more just circularity: case studies from the Brussels-Capital Region
Giulia Caterina Verga, Ahmed Zaib Khan
- 758** Circularity through Ecofeminism. Embracing Inclusivity in Flanders' Urban Planning
Wendy Wuyts

Special Workshops

PUBLIC SPACE FOR INCLUSIVE CITIES: THE BIENNIAL OF PUBLIC SPACE

Coordinator: Pietro Garau, Marichela Sepe

- 762** Urban regeneration area of Ex-fiera
Carlo Cupiccia, Francesca Sforza
- 764** Enhancing social inclusion in small towns: projects and networks
Antonio Bocca, Romina D'Ascanio
- 766** Reporting on the Multiethnic City: Notes for a 2025 Report on Public space
Manuela Alessi, Pietro Garau
- 768** Inclusive decision-making processes in public policies
Carmen Giannino
- 770** How much public space has my city got to offer?
Luciano G. Alfaya, Patricia Muniz-Nunez
- 772** Public space in the "bipolar" urban entities of coastal towns
Cristian Gori

- 774** Inclusive public spaces former ex-fiera of Rome
Alice Potenza, Paola Moricca, Flavia Armenia, Antonio D'Ambrosio

- 776** Proximity and Inclusive Public Space
Marichela Sepe

Special Workshops

UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION, THE KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

Coordinator: Barbara Chiarelli

- 780** Safety and inclusion of urban public spaces
Federica Cicalese, Michele Grimaldi, Isidoro Fasolino
- 782** The research activities of Florence Accessibility Lab (FAL) at the University of Florence
Luca Marzi
- 784** Rising Design for All awareness: bridging theory to practice in architecture and professionals courses to design inclusive environments
Stefano Capolongo, Erica Isa Mosca
- 786** An opportunity to re-discover the complexity of the inclusion. The pilot case of Mantua
Carlo Peraboni, Stefania Campioli, M. Borini
- 788** FVG Accessibile: the Regional research system to support accessibility policies
Barbara Chiarelli, Christina Conti, Ilaria Garofolo, Elena Marchigiani, Teresa Sambrotta

Special Workshops

FINDINGS AND EVIDENCES FROM THE PNRR PROJECT RETURN

Coordinators: Daniele Vettorato, Libera Amenta, Federica Vingelli

- 792** Planning and design strategies for activating resilience
Ilaria Cazzola, Benedetta Giudice, Angioletta Voghera

- 794** Green transition for climate resilient urban eco-districts
Valeria D'Ambrosio, Maria Fabrizia Clemente, Sabrina Puzone, Antonio Sferratore, Sara Verde
- 796** Assessing the supply and the demand of urban greenspaces. Case study of Cagliari, Italy
Federica Isola, Federica Leone
- 798** AI approach of emotion detection for multi-risk analysis in urban context
Vittorio Miraglia, Barbara Cardone and Ferdinando Di Martino
- 800** Circular metabolism for planning resilient cities in multi-risk critical contexts
Sara Piccirillo, Federica Vingelli, Libera Amenta, Anna Attademo, Rosaria Iodice, Benedetta Pastena, Maria Simioli, Michelangelo Russo
- 802** Enhancing Urban Resilience: An exploration of transformational stages and organisational adaptations for climate neutrality
Daniele Vettorato
- 804** Regulating ecosystem services in urban contexts. Supply-related evidence from the city of Cagliari, Italy
Sabrina Lai, Corrado Zoppi
- 806** Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Mitigation and Adaptation, between the technical and the philosophic: towards the selection and appraisal of European urban design solutions
Isabella Trabucco, Silvio Cristiano, Carlo Pisano
- 810** River contract: an integrated and partipated approach for a sustainable management of water and territories
Massimo Bastiani
- 812** From the municipal landfill to the Nature Reserve up to the River Contract
David Belfiori
- 814** From the Vulture Regional Natural Park, the proposal for a River Contract to activate a process of sustainable and participatory development of the territories
Carlo Gilio, Laura Stabile
- 816** Involving communities in strategic planning at the regional scale. A regional design perspective on river agreements from basin visions to local projects
Valeria Lingua
- 818** Between management plans and environmental contracts. Challenges for an integrated wetlands' governance
Stefano Magaudo, Serena Muccitelli, Carolina Pozzi, Romina D'Ascanio, Anna Laura Palazzo
- 820** From local participation to basin-scale planning for water quality. River, Lake and Wetland Contracts in Piedmont
Paolo Mancin, Floriana Clemente
- 822** Water management and river contracts in moldova
Endro Martini, Alexandru Tabacaru

Special Workshops

RIVER CONTRACTS AS VOLUNTARY AND NEGOTIATED PLANNING TOOLS

Coordinator: Massimo Bastiani

- 808** River Contracts: Innovation and Experimentation
Angioletta Voghera, Irene Ardito

Building waterfront resilience through heritage planning

Research on European cities in transition

Giulia Luciani*

Complexity, dynamism and plurality are key characteristics of coastal environments. Long-running human presence adds layers to these rich and heterogeneous environments, but at the same time, due to the rapid alteration of the settlement patterns in the last centuries, and emerging threats such as environmental degradation and climate change, it exacerbates their vulnerability. Resilience has therefore become an essential target of urban and territorial planning. In this context, the entanglement of ecological conversion with the emergent field of heritage planning is drawing attention to an original nexus between heritage and resilience, to be explored in research and practice.

The urban sector that revolves around the terminal trait of river Tiber is an example of urbanised delta area which holds significant untapped potential. At the convergence of crucial environmental factors like the coastal system and the river course, it is also one of the most vital sectors in the metropolitan area both in terms of population and economy.

The primary goal of the research has been to explore approaches for the Tiber delta and similar areas, aiming to connect environmental aspects with a rich historical and environmental heritage. This heritage is the primary asset of the territory, with the purpose of initiating an ecologically oriented urban transformation. The central question was whether heritage can actively contribute to such transformation of the urbanized water landscape in general, with an overarching goal to assess the integration of strategies related to heritage in urban-territorial planning and design as part of a broader effort to regenerate urbanized environments with a focus on ecological balance.

To explore the issue of heritage and its possible active roles, a comparative case study analysis was developed, aiming at depicting the current practices mobilizing heritage in the urban transformations in Europe. The selected case studies are three major European cities - Stockholm, Gdansk, and Lisbon - differing in geographical location, hydrographic

structure, and urban and hydraulic identity and culture. All three are “cities on multiple scales”, serving as nodes in a metropolitan territorial formation. The scale of urban transformations examined varies for each city: a neighbourhood scale for Stockholm, an urban scale for Gdansk, and a territorial scale for Lisbon. This allowed for capturing as diverse situations and processes as possible. Similarly, the scale and spatial configuration of the heritage involved in urban transformations also changed based on the territorial context: a punctual good in the case of Stockholm, a network of goods in Gdansk, up to the entire estuarine territory in the case of Lisbon, marking a conceptual shift from “heritage in the territory” to “territory as heritage”.

In all cases, there is a general intent to mend or strengthen the relationships between the city and the natural environment. Stockholm formulates this relationship through the concept of sustainability, understood as the use of technological innovation to achieve the proper integration of new construction neighbourhoods into the environmental context. Gdansk leverages the opportunity, provided by the relocation of many port activities, to restore a certain porosity to public space by opening it to contact with the previously denied water space. In Lisbon, efforts are made to achieve cohesion between ecological and social values in the urban landscape, where public space and the hydrographic network tend to merge into the estuary as a metropolitan-scale public space. The results of the case study analysis show how establishing new alliances can widen the scope, impact, and efficacy of heritage in local and territorial planning generating unique opportunities for sensitive urban and territorial transformation. However, critical aspects and conflictual situations are often disguised or de-problematized, so that risks of exclusion arise if the issues of identity, equity and spatial justice are not carefully addressed. For instance, the analysis revealed power dynamics in the heritagization processes, bound to heritage narratives and subsequent valorisation, possibly leading to the marginalization of non-dominant narratives and representations.

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Building on the case study analysis, the research moved on to formulate a proper heritage-based strategy for the ecological regeneration of the Tiber delta area. In the Tiber delta open spaces are crucial for intervention, and the structured historical-environmental elements form the backbone of this network. This systemic heritage serves as infrastructure for the territory, potentially offering benefits to the urban environment and contributing to local life. An infrastructural approach to historical-environmental heritage is therefore outlined, valid within the specific context and replicable in areas with similar characteristics. The innovative design concept of ecohistorical infrastructure is introduced, which revisits and updates widely experimented and versatile tools such as green infrastructure. Ecohistorical infrastructures are devices shaping the urbanized landscape by integrating natural, built, and historicized elements into a network of nodes - places capable of stimulating greater interaction with the environment, as they possess historical depth, density of meanings and relationships - and connections. Participatory methodologies prove crucial in identifying and reactivating these places, leading to renovated ecologies of inhabiting delta areas.

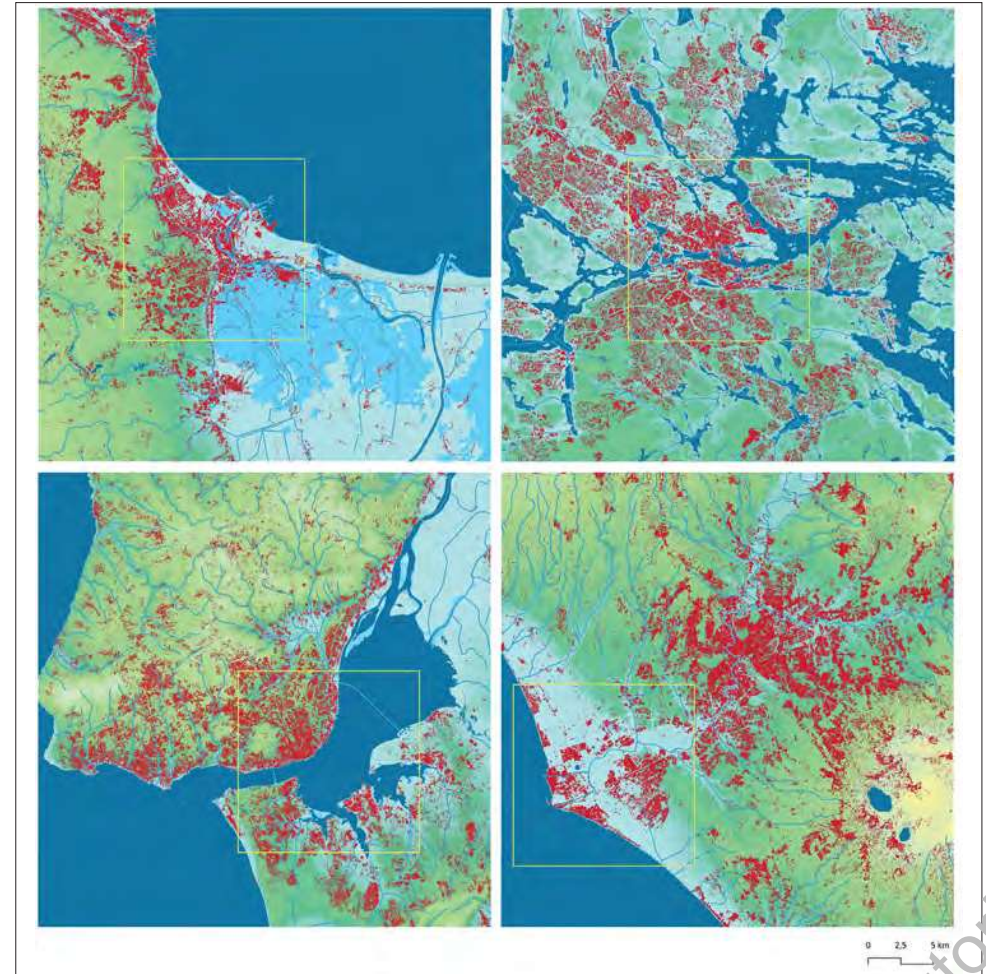


Fig. 1.
Left to right: Gdansk,
Stockholm, Lisbon, Rome. The
abacus of the case studies
establishes a comparison
between the four urban
areas, focusing on their
relationship with the wider
metropolitan area and the
hydrography, which is the
base of their urban and
environmental structure.
Source: Author.