The following document constitutes the contribution of the Biennial of Public Space to a process of further definition on the same subject that will be conducted at the global level in collaboration with the United Nations Programme on Human Settlements (UN-Habitat), in order to make a significant contribution to the preparatory process of the third Conference of the United Nations on Human Settlements to be held in 2016.

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Preamble

1. In addition to the need to exhibit good projects and exemplary realizations, the Biennial of Public Space is also born out of a strong need to support the desire, shared by many citizens and long-sighted and efficient public administrators, to make public space the banner of urban civility.

2. The main criteria this document is based on are that a) it is useful to formulate a clear and comprehensive definition of public space, b) that public space should be regarded as a *public good,* c) that the Charter should contain reasonable and shared principles with regard to the conception, the design, the realization, the management, the transformability and the enjoyment of public space, d) that it must be a concise document and, just like public space, accessible to all.

3. The Charter of Public Space aims at serving all those who believe in the city and in its extraordinary ability for hospitality, solidarity, conviviality and sharing; in its inimitable virtue in encouraging social interaction, encounter, togetherness, freedom and democracy; and in its calling for giving life to these values through public space. At the same time, cities show the worsening of economic, social, ethnic, cultural and generational inequalities. Public space must be the place where citizenship rights are guaranteed and differences are respected and appreciated.

4. The charter is based on a wide and inclusive concept of citizenship that goes beyond its legal definition. All in their capacity, as users, are “citizens” and have the same rights and duties with regard to the public space.

5. When citizens coincide with the inhabitants they have the right to be involved through participatory processes in the creation and management of public space.

I. Definition of Public Space

6. Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. Each public space has its own spatial, historic, environmental, social and economic features.

7. Public spaces are a key element of individual and social well-being, the places of a community’s collective life, expressions of the diversity of their common natural and cultural richness and a foundation of their identity, as expressed by the European Landscape Convention. The community recognizes itself in its

public places and pursues the improvement of their spatial quality.

8. Public spaces consist of open environments (e.g. streets, sidewalks, squares, gardens, parks) and in sheltered spaces created without a profit motive and for everyone's enjoyment (e.g. public libraries, museums). Both when they possess a clear identity, can be defined as "places". The objective is that all public spaces should become "places".

9. Views differ on whether public spaces should or should not be publicly owned. However, all public spaces that are also publicly owned offer more stable guarantees of access and enjoyment over time, because they are less subject to those legitimate changes of use typical of private ownership.

10. Public spaces, whenever safeguards of natural or historical value allow, must be made accessible without barriers to the motorial, sensorially and intellectively handicapped.

11. Analogously, all areas even if publicly owned or unfenced, which by their characteristics are substantially unusable by the public inaccessible slopes, abandoned areas, or cut-outs, cannot be considered a public space and cannot be counted as a service or public infrastructure.

12. Conversely, public spaces which are not yet accessible and/or usable must be considered as "potential public spaces", and therefore as a precious resource for the strengthening and renovation of the existing system of public space, and thus of urban quality as a whole.

II. Typologies of public space

13. Public spaces can be distinguished in: a) spaces that have an exclusive or prevalent functional character; b) spaces that presuppose or favour individual uses; c) spaces that, by mix of functions, form, meanings and by connecting the built with the non-built, have the prevalent role of aggregation and social condensation. In the web of these latter functions is the essence of the city.

14. Public spaces:

a) Are the physical web and support for the movement and the stationing of people and means of transport, from which the vitality of the city depends;

b) Host market and accessible commercial activities in fixed premises, public venues and other services (collective and not, public and private), in which the socio-economic dimension of the city is always expressed;

c) Offer precious opportunities for recreation, physical exercise and regeneration for all (parks, gardens, public sports facilities);

d) Help promote education and culture(e.g. museums, public libraries);

e) Are places of individual and collective memory, in which the identity of the people is mirrored and finds sustenance, growing in the knowledge that they are a community;

f) Promote conviviality, encounter, and freedom of expression;

g) Are an integral and meaningful part of the urban architecture and landscape, with a

determinant role in the overall image of the city;

15. For the above characteristics, they represent the principal resource available to public administration on which to build integrated policies and to a broad range of urban planning, of morphological and functional upgrading of the urban fabric and of social and economic regeneration.

III. Creation of public space

16. Every public space should be designed with full consideration for diversity.

17. Public space is the gymnasium of democracy, an opportunity for creating and maintaining over time the sentiment of citizenship and the awareness of the roles that each of us has and can have with regard to one's daily lifestyle and to one's living environment.

18. It is advisable for decisions regarding the creation, the management and the enjoyment of public space to be subjected to clear and transparent participatory processes with all interested stakeholders. Such processes, be they institutionalized, regulated or spontaneous, are to be regarded as a right of urban residents and not as unilateral initiatives of government.

19. It is vital to regard urban public spaces as a continuous, articulated and integrated system, to be developed from the scale of neighbourhoods relationships to vast environmental spaces, to facilitate the diffusion of its enjoyment within the whole community and to raise urban quality.

20. Designing public spaces also means taking into account alternative and creative practices based on new techniques of communication and urban usage.

21. The urban public-space system requires a unitary view capable of bringing out the features to maintain, enhance and communicate. It is therefore advisable for local governments to adopt a specific strategy for public-space networks.

22. Within public-space networks it is also advisable to identify polarities and aggregative phenomena, with a view to prevent psychological obstacles from reinforcing physical ones. The interconnection and improvement of public space as a strategy for upgrading peripheries and suburban areas should include improving connections, the enhancement of multifunctionality and access and the reduction of phenomena of privatization and exclusion.

23. Eliminating and/or overcoming the physical barriers that impede or limit access to certain categories of users is therefore a priority goal to pursue both in the design of new public spaces and in the adaptation of existing ones.

24. In extension plans of newly urbanizing cities, whose population will double over the next 10-20 years (Africa and Asia), it is very important to guarantee sufficient amounts of well connected and adequately proportioned public spaces.
(especially…..)

25. Design must pay full attention to maintenance and management costs by using simple solutions and materials that are durable, simple, easily replaceable and climatically adequate.

26. The upgrading of unused public sites is a great opportunity for enhancing the supply and quality of urban public space. In designing the re-use of privately owned derelict sites, the extension and design of new public spaces must take into account both environmental considerations (and eventual shortcomings to compensate) and the socio-economic interrelations within the entire urban sector they are to be part of.

27. The role of urban public spaces for environmental regulation (drainage, microclimate…), the environmental protection of ecologically valuable areas (river banks, wetlands, biodiversity) and the reduction of urban environmental risks must be taken into account both in the design and management phases.

28. In areas destroyed by catastrophic events public spaces must be the starting point of the reconstruction process.

29. The creation, improvement and management of public spaces can provide an opportunity for new job creation and private investment, also in harmony with the provisions of the European Landscape Convention.

30. Interdisciplinary and participatory approaches to public-space design are an exciting opportunity for planners, landscape professionals, architects, technicians and designers to express fully their social roles.

IV. Constraints on the Creation, Management and Enjoyment of Good Public Spaces

31. The following can be considered constraints on the creation, management and enjoyment of good public spaces:

a. The commoditisation of urban sociality (such as the proliferation of specialized facilities for shopping and leisure, private sports facilities, etc.);

b. Decreasing resources for the creation and maintenance of public spaces due to weakened fiscal revenues and the frequent inefficiency of public spending;

c. The declining inclination of citizens to affirm their rights;

d. The weakening of social cohesion, the little regard for public goods on the part of large portions of the citizenry and the increasing frequency of acts of vandalism;

e. The pressures exercised by speculative real estate interests;

f. Design choices that ignore multifunctional criteria and structural connections;

g. The difficulties encountered by many local authorities in exercising a role of effective public leadership;

h. The sectoralization of administrative structures and the frequent lack of communication between various departments;

i. The vulnerability of many public spaces to improper uses such as the transformation of public squares into parking lots, the vehicular occupation of spaces reserved for pedestrians, the encroachment on public spaces by restaurant and commercial activities outside permitted areas;

j. Perceived or real insecurity in public spaces, with consequent effects of limited use, abandonment and decline;

k. The conviction that the “web” and “social networks” have become “the new public spaces”, to the extent that the traditional ones are regarded as irrelevant or, at the very least, outmoded.

l. The absence of directions and references, which may cause a condition of deep disorientation in users of urban space.

V. Management of Public Space

32. The management of public space is a prevalent responsibility of local authorities. In order to be discharged successfully, this role requires the active collaboration of citizens, civil society and the private sector.

33. Reducing private automobile traffic in cities is a primary condition for improving environmental conditions, enhancing public spaces and making them more liveable. Favouring zero-energy consumption mobility, like walking and cycling, improves the environment and enhances the quality of public spaces and urban living.

34. Education in a responsible use of public spaces is the least expensive of all form of maintenance and management. It is useful to conduct awareness campaigns in schools, through the media, on the web to educate citizens to a virtuous use of public spaces.

35. Public space improvements determine significant value increments. Consequently, at least part of them must be recaptured for the benefit of the community.

36. Insufficient integration between interventions and management weakens civic awareness in the use of common goods and is a factor in the deterioration of public spaces after their realization or upgrading. Interventions consisting in the creation or upgrading of public spaces must be accompanied by

measures and provisions for the maintenance of spaces and infrastructure.

37. After the realization and/or renewal of spaces has taken place, public administrations should make it possible for citizens and their associations to organize events and whatever may contribute to stabilize the permanent use of such spaces

38. The adoption of management strategies based on dialogue and participation when programming and designing, is decisive for gaining the "appropriation" of spaces on the part of local communities, keeping maintenance costs under control and encouraging forms of co-management.

39. In terms of the area they cover, streets, squares and sidewalks constitute the overwhelming portion of the urban space used by the public. It is therefore important for their use to be disciplined to reconcile the different functions they are to perform, granting priority to pedestrian and non-motorized mobility.

40. Both temporal and physical limitations to the use of public open space due to safety reasons should not unreasonably restrict the enjoyment by the public.

41. The privatization or concession of public spaces to private actors is a phenomenon which involves cities all over the world, where important public space resources are systematically alienated or turned over exclusively to private concerns for a number of reasons: generating budgetary resources, increasing private investment, yielding to lobbies or interest groups, corruption practices, lack of management capacity. Public authorities on the one hand, and citizens on the other, must arm themselves with means to control and evaluate such policies.

42. It is important to adopt policies that encourage the permanence of artisans and neighbourhood shops, which contribute to the quality of life and to the animation and vivacity of daily-use public spaces.

VI. Enjoyment of Public Spaces

43. All citizens, regardless of their role, are users of public space. All of them have the right to access and enjoy it in complete freedom, within the rules of civic coexistence. In cities ever more complex and diverse, this requires democratic processes, dialogue and regard for diversity.

44. The participation of citizens and in particular of communities of residents is of crucial importance for the maintenance and management of public spaces, particularly in situations of poverty and limited public resources, such as those in the developing countries. Partnership arrangements between citizens, local governments and private concerns are of relevant importance in all circumstances.

45. The enjoyment of public space involves rights and duties. The right to enjoy adequate public spaces involves the duty to contribute to this goal through freely chosen modalities that can vary from the mere adoption of responsible individual or collective behaviours to involvement in initiatives of active citizenry.

46. The enjoyment of public spaces is a fundamental ingredient for determining and applying indicators of their quality, to be employed throughout the entire creation- management-enjoyment cycle.

47. The peaceful use of public spaces for rallies, marches and demonstrations is an integral expression of democracy. Therefore, such use cannot be denied without valid and justified motivations.

48. Events and interventions defined as temporary, included the so-called "urban public art", particularly if linked to an overall strategy, are a form of enjoyment of public space that can become a "good practice" to confer meaning and urban quality to "waiting spaces" rapidly, at low cost and with a strong involvement of the community.

49. The enjoyment of public space is intimately linked to its civil, respectful and responsible use. The quality of public-space enjoyment is therefore tied not only to the availability, quality, mutability, adaptability and maintenance level of public spaces, but also to the behaviour of individual citizens.

50. The good use of public spaces is closely linked to their mutability and adaptability in relation to the changing needs of citizens.