

## **Shaping Civic Space: Challenges of the Anthropocene**

**Anita Berrizbeitia**

Flooding, storm surge, drought, and contamination occur with increased regularity and continue to be primary drivers of landscape architectural projects throughout the world. Whether in urban, coastal, or inland conditions landscape-based approaches continue to be preferred over engineering and architectural ones. These approaches are largely centered on concepts such as landscape performance and ecosystem services, both of which are hinged on nature's inherent capacity to adapt to changing conditions over time. Adaptability affords resilience, reduction of risk in the face of unknown and abrupt change, and economic gain. We can now monetize the labor that vegetation does as it sinks carbon, remediates water and soil, or reduce heat-island effects, for instance. Landscape has become highly instrumentalized, and with its quantification enters the undesirable side effect of its generic representation.

Yet the best responses to these issues indicate a broad set of sensibilities and an ongoing motivation for experimentation and innovation. Today, we witness an ever-expanding field of possibilities for engaging the multiple challenges brought about by climate change through synthetic and pluralistic design that engages the imagination and expands the realm of what is possible. The Anthropocene is both a crisis and an opportunity. Opportunity because there is increasing urgency and public demand for civic spaces as environments that offer unique experiences, especially those that counter the homogenizing forces of globalization on cities, and the declining availability of public spaces for civil society to gather. In response, contemporary designers have introduced new typologies of civic space, expanding the range of what constitutes the shared space of cultural and social exchange. Recent projects demonstrate that, even in the context of climate change, the concept of ecosystem services, while necessary, is not sufficiently "thick" on its own to address the civic dimension of landscapes. Hybrid approaches that combine functionality with narrative, strong visual identity and symbolic references characterize the best contemporary practices.

This session will explore what such hybrid approaches entail, and how contemporary designers seek to integrate the civic dimension of social life into the mandates for flood control, the sensible provision of water and, when needed, its remediation. Further, the creation of civic spaces often requires new approaches for funding, public participation, and governance. This suggests not only an expanded field of practice, but an expanded role for the designer, who often applies creative design thinking to the procurement of funding and to new methods of engaging the public. Finally, it will explore how contemporary practices work beyond the technical to produce memorable landscapes that support both long-term resilience and the construction of collective experience.