

# About the Guide to Open Places ...

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The Guide to Open Places deals with open, adaptable structures of the city – so-called ‘Open Places’. It is based on the work of a research project at ETH Zurich.

Open Places set impulses, make a point and have effects. Even in regulated societies they provide niches of openness, freedom and self-determination. These places give a glimpse of what an Open City could be and look like. They are the spatial manifestation of the idea of coexistence.

The Guide to Open Places is in search of these Open Places in the city. An Open Place describes a certain spatial situation in the city. It offers possibilities and opportunities, thus space for various actions and people. The potentials of each place are recognized and taken advantage of by the users. Only through their interactions the place becomes alive and its openness a quality.

Open places have two very decisive characteristics: openness and stability. They may therefore be described as dynamic-stable structures, i.e. they exhibit conciseness and stability through their history, ambiance and their context and at the same time provide the openness for a programmatic and semantic change. This interplay makes these places so interesting as well as valuable. They are a platform for exchange and coexistence and contribute to the productivity, cultural complexity and diversity of the city.

The qualities of openness could be found in different structures and scales: in architecture, public space and urban ensembles. The configuration of the built fabric has an essential influence on the openness of a city. But Open Places have not only a spatial dimension but also a social and political one. Through the use and utilisation of a place the user makes a statement and points out his or her attitude. The user influences the place and vice versa. An Open Place neither domineers the user, nor dictates a societal function. On the contrary: it has a certain radiation that stimulates because its definition is vague and modifiable. So the user has the opportunity to actively define and utilise the place. All dimensions together create an Open Place. Like Detlev Ipsen explains: „It becomes apparent now that the open city is probably not a clearly structured and thus abstract place, but rather a string and combination of inhabited spaces which connect paradoxes within themselves.“ (Detlev Ipsen, The Socially Spatial Conditions of the Open City – a Theoretical Sketch)

The status of a place can change over time. One option is the redefinition of a closed place towards an open place. This goes along with a programmatic change of such a place, for example, a so far not accessible industrial area, will be transformed. But also a change in society and political systems can open up a former exclusive, closed place. This change can also happen in the opposite direction from open to closed. Some places have the status of openness just for a defined moment or a period of time. For this time they are a platform for activities, communication and interaction and for us they are temporary Open Places. Hence we are interested in places that are temporarily open and places that lost their openness and have been closed down recently through political, social or economical reasons.

We had started an expedition and looked for these places all over the world. The project Guide to Open Places consisted of a research work, a web-platform and the exhibition in the Forum of the Biennale. All collected places were shown at the forum of the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam “Open City” - [www.iabr.nl](http://www.iabr.nl) and are now a thinktank for further research.

We would be pleased to tell you more about the results and give you more information. Please do not hesitate to contact us:

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