

Laudation Berges du Rhône

Gunnar Ericson, Malmö

Berges de Rhone, River Banks of Rhone in City of Lyon

Many of the great cities of Europe are located close to water- at the sea, close to a lake or at the embankments of a river. The location has often been the reason for the birth of the city, being the base for work, business and transports. The picture has changed. Today we have other challenges and see new possibilities regarding water as an asset in cities.

The landscape in cities is playing an important role for identity and image both for inhabitants and visitors, for children and young people – for you and for me. As a consequence of that we see an increasing number of restored and newly designed green parks, public spaces and waterfronts.

Some cities just do it right – those cities we fall in love with, we admire their visions, objectives and determination. And when they govern – they don't do it by rules and restrictions. They do it by a humble invitation for dialogue and with an open mind.

One of the cities I personally have fallen in love with is the city of Lyon in France. I don't love only Lyon – there are others. But Lyon is special - by many reasons. In this very day and at this prestigious occasion it's mostly thanks to the creation of a place and destination which both is a great public space, a new astonishing riverfront and a long green urban park. The special clue in Lyon is that those characters all together contribute to and create the splendid "river banks of Rhone".

Some years ago the banks were full of heavy traffic and open air car parks. Thousands of parking lots almost everywhere. The city started a long planning process with one clear objective - to connect the city and the river again.

A competition was arranged and ended in a proposal creating a brand-new meeting place, an area for recreation and a landscape in close contact with nature. It's all realized today. It's a beautiful park that changes from a natural character more far away to an urban-like design closer to the city-center.

A skilled landscape design, by Yves Adrien and Jourda architects, is significant for the area. Near the river you find open ground and surfaces covered with granite and concrete. Other areas have beautiful, generous and well-maintained green lawns. There is also a large and wide pond with water - strengthening the sense and presence of the river even more.

The ponds are often used by playing children and adults. Children have also special and attractive playgrounds designed by the fantasy and temper of artists involved.

All over the area are the slopes down to the river used for constructing stairs which are extremely popular for rest, for chilling and chatting or just for you to enjoy other people's activities as fishing, skating, sporting and biking or just relaxing in the sunshine.

Very central in the area is a large grandstand – it is magnificent in size and has a huge number of curved, parallel lines. In its simplicity it's a piece of art of its own. Thousands of spectators are using the grandstand at concerts, other spontaneous performances and events. And you will often find them there – both the people of Lyon and the events.

A world famous and annual event is "Fete Lumiere" (as you all know the mother of light festivals in Europe) in early December which brings light and temporary art into the area. Benches and chairs in strong colors, wooden pontoons and other details also contribute strongly to both activities and to enhance the landscape of the banks.

The park has been planted with trees in strict rows following the curve of the river. It contains some beautiful ornamental plantings. Different sorts of grasses has been used a lot – very fancy when flowering or touched by the wind. Flowering meadows are very colorful and bring butterflies, bees and other wildlife into the park.

The jury of the EGHN congratulates the city of Lyon and their many inhabitants and visitors – we also congratulate Daniel Boulens, director for parks and recreation, visiting us here today representing the Maire of Lyon. He is one of many in response of the project - not mentioning everybody of those hundreds and thousands in Lyon who have been involved in the planning- and design process.

The river banks of Rhone are a distinguished best practice for a new generation of urban parks and inspire all of us. They show us that water brings joy and health into people's life; it shows us that parks are essential for beauty in cities; they show that public space and a rich social life are closely connected to each other and are offering a supporting arena for people's demands, wishes and longings.

Many European cities have a lot to learn from this innovative contemporary concept of an urban park. The river banks of Rhone and Lyon are worth to be visited and worth to be loved.

Once more – congratulation to the City of Lyon!