

# IUPA 2021



**The International Urban Project Award (IUPA) highlights the interface between architecture and urban space and its meaning for public life. Presented by Bauwelt and World Architecture Magazine and supported by Messe München and the Architecture Society of China, the IUPA has now been awarded for a third time. The jury consisted of Li Cundong, Kristin Feireiss, Cao Jiaming, Zhang Jie, Matthias Sauerbruch, and Boris Schade-Bünsow. With this edition of the IUPA, we were on the lookout for pioneering architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design projects that are dedicated to the public space. The winning and shortlisted projects are characterized by sustainable approaches with regard to materials, the handling of pre-existing architectural substance, and flexibility of use. Whether large or small scale, these buildings link indoor and outdoor spaces as continuous public landscapes and illustrate the ways built projects can activate neighborhood development.**

Text **Paul Andreas, Karen Jung**

**The** supreme mission of architecture is the configuration of the spaces that shape a society, the places that define its character. By virtue of the resultant physical openness, accessibility, and options for use, the design of public spaces in particular conditions collective life in a positive direction. The International Urban Project Award is dedicated to this triad of architecture, public space, and society. This international prize for architecture – awarded for the third time in 2021 – singles out outstandingly innovative projects worldwide that succeed in generating communal spaces that satisfy the complex demands of our contemporary transformative societies.

Within the growing landscape of national and international prizes for architecture and landscape design, the IUPA is distinguished by its singular profile. To begin with, the creation of public spaces is conceived in the broadest possible sense, and with little regard for disciplinary boundaries: here, in contradistinction to the European Prize for Urban Public Space, awarded by CCCB Barcelona and other architectural institutions, for example, the selected projects are not restricted to classical public, open, outdoor spaces – i.e. the design of public squares or parks. Instead, the IUPA regards public space as an integral design task that pertains to both exterior spaces as well as to the interior spatial configuration of buildings.

## **Interface between interior and exterior**

And it was for this reason that the premiere IUPA in 2019 singled out the Oodi Central Library in Helsinki by ALA Architects. In a remarkable way, the library links interior and exterior to shape a unified spatial landscape: this authentic manifestation of the knowledge-based society has become



Big Air Shougang converts an abandoned steel plant into a sports, culture and nature site, appropriating the abandoned industrial heritage for civil life.  
Photo: Brian

Tilburg's new library contributes to the reinvention of the urban library as a meeting and communication space.  
Photo: Stijn Bollaert



Sara Cultural Centre, being one of the tallest timber buildings worldwide, continues the local tradition of timber construction in the medium-sized town of Skellefteå.  
Photo: Jonas Westling



a yardstick for innovative library building worldwide. And the recipient of the Special Prize as well—The Shed in New York City, an interdisciplinary center for art and popular culture designed by Diller Scofidio & Renfro—illustrates in an ideal-typical fashion just how flexibly the delimitation between building and exterior can be configured: the roof of the cultural center, composed of ETFE foil pillows, can be extended flexibly on rails that are incorporated into the structure to create a spatial enclosure that encompasses a public forecourt. The second Special Prize winner, too, is active along the interface between interior and exterior, building and open space: in the context of the Nantou quarter of Shenzhen's old town, the Chinese architectural office Urbanus illustrated strikingly how targeted constructive interventions—for example with accessible buildings used for cultural functions—are capable of interlinking and revitalizing traditional urban public spaces.

It goes without saying that the IUPA is also strongly characterized by the German-Chinese awarding partnership, designed to do justice to China's growing importance on the global architecture scene. In no other country worldwide have spatial and settlement structures changed as profoundly and in such far-reaching ways as in the People's Republic over the past thirty years.



Due to corona the jury meeting was split in two: Matthias Sauerbruch, Kristin Feireiss and Boris Schade-Bünsow at the 2021 jury meeting in Berlin. Below: Li Cundong and Zhang Jie met in Beijing with Cao Jiaming online. Photos: Tim Formella, Casper Godtlielsen (top), CADE (bottom)



In the hope that these projects will receive commensurate attention internationally, the award also relies upon the well-established expertise of the Chinese magazine World Architecture and of the Architecture Society of China, both represented on the jury. In China in particular, an architecture prize that focuses on public space has the potential to provide vital impulses for the continuing development of building culture: in the past, public squares and buildings served primarily to project power. To an increasing degree, contemporary public spaces must instead respond to the need of modern Chinese civil society for openness, accessibility, as well as a diversity of utilizations and users.

## Reutilization

With IUPA 2020, the main prizes were awarded to the flowing spatial landscape of Hunters Point Library in Queens by Steven Holl Architects, and the converted culture high-rise SESC 24 de Maio in Sao Paulo by Paulo Mendes da Rocha and MMBB. Nonetheless, two of the three recognitions were awarded to Chinese entries: the Songyang Culture Neighbourhood in Lishui by Jiakun Architects revitalized the area between old, abandoned temples by means of a public park that

is interwoven with the surrounding urban district. The Tank Shanghai project by OPEN Architecture transformed a cluster of aviation fuel tanks set along the banks of the Huangpu River into a cultural center that merges with the surrounding riverine landscape to create a place at the edge of the metropolis that is socially inclusive and accessible to all. The third recognition was awarded to the Future Africa Innovation Campus in Pretoria, the work of Earthworld Architects, a place where learning flows together with life outside of the auditorium.

The award-winning projects of IUPA 2021, too, exemplify the way in which the quality of public outdoor and indoor spaces is bound up with culture in the broadest sense, and with cultural building tasks in the narrower sense. The projects provide opportunities to create complex public spaces that are characterized by unrestricted accessibility and by respect for all members of a society. All three of the projects that received awards in the new edition of IUPA for 2021 go beyond aesthetic and social concerns to develop genuinely ecological and sustainable solutions. More than in previous years, the focus has shifted now toward substantive contributions to the sustainable use of resources, and hence to the slowing of rapidly advancing global climate change. In this spirit, all of this year's prize-winning projects are explicitly dedicated to the reutilization of existing structures or brownfields, or consciously use climate-positive local materials derived from sustainable production while prioritizing the shortest transport routes.

In 2021, the main IUPA prize goes to a large-scale Chinese project, an achievement that will enjoy global public attention due to its role as the venue for the XXIV Olympic Games in early 2022. Big Air Shougang by Atelier TeamMinus is a snowboarding stadium set along the western periphery of Beijing within an extensive conversion zone: the area was part of the Chinese Shoudu Gang Tie Chang Steelworks, occupying a heavy industry zone measuring circa 900 ha. Through large-scale measures devoted to the preservation, reutilization, and expansion of industrial megastructures, China impressively demonstrates its seriousness about reducing CO<sub>2</sub> and greenhouse gas emissions, in particular in the building sector. Big Air Shougang is an exemplary instance of this ambitious transformation: the new sports facility has the potential to infuse the district with additional potential for development: the close interlinking of green open spaces with the surrounding dynamically growing quarter – which provides production space for creative future-oriented industries and culture alongside office space – will hopefully further invigorate the area while further diversifying the constellation of public space utilizations.

## Low-threshold accessibility

While "Big Air" takes the public spectacle of a competitive sporting event as a point of departure for urban revitalization, the other two recipients of IUPA recognitions strives to activate public spaces through culture. In the small but expanding city of Skellefteå in northern Sweden, the second tallest timber high-rise worldwide, with twenty full stories, accommodates a hotel that rises from a four-storey pedestal complex that links a variety of urban cultural facilities flexibly with one another. In the interior, the "Sara Kulturhuset" by White Arkitekter groups six halls with performance stages, surrounded by the transparent exterior shell that contains multiple uses. A public promenade through the building, with its large open staircase, also ensures that the building will be used by passersby as well, who will hopefully enjoy unanticipated encounters with the complex's cultural offerings. With its central location between the train station and the town hall, the building promises to become an urban living room for all.

The third award recipient, the project "LocHal" in Tilburg in the Netherlands, designed by Civic Architects, also uses a pre-existing structure: two older, disused work halls of a locomotive plant, were subjected to a scrupulous metamorphosis, and now serve as the city's new municipal library, set on the inhospitable northern side of the train station. Nearly 90% of the original structure was preserved, while the almost inhuman original dimensions of the double hall is now broken up by multiple mezzanine floors and galleries, all accessed from a central, cascade-style open staircase. To allow for concurrent utilizations such as events in the hall, which is climate controlled only selectively, Petra Blaisse and her Inside/Outside Studio created building-height textile curtains that serve as flexible, acoustically efficacious room dividers while alluding to Tilburg's long-standing textile tradition. Here as well, the building can be traversed via a public promenade, generating low-threshold accessibility.

With these three projects, IUPA 2021 demonstrates again how places and existing architectural structures can be reutilized in high-quality ways—how modifications or transformations can succeed by showing respect for earlier architectural substance and architectural history.

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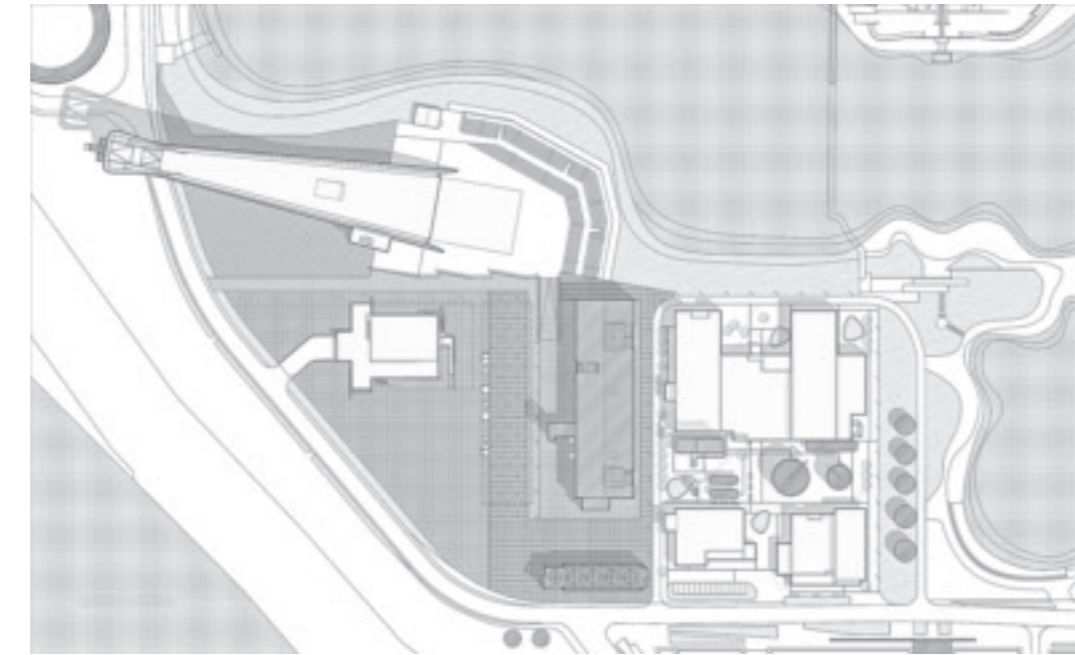
The award ceremony 2020 took place as part of BAU Congress China on October 29th at the New China International Exhibition Center (NCIEC), Beijing, China. Photos: BCC 2020

## First prize

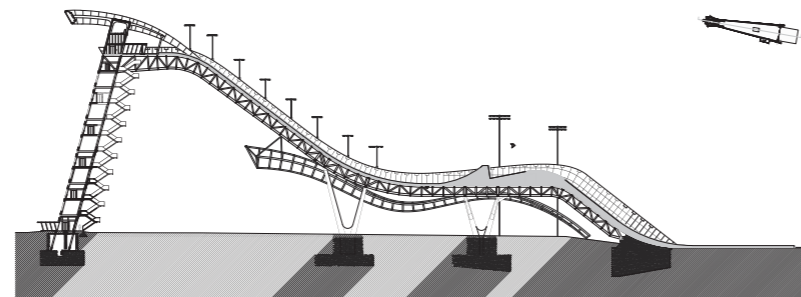
### Big Air Shougang

Atelier TeamMinus, Beijing

The project Big Air Shougang transforms a gigantic, decommissioned steelworks into a center for sports, culture, nature, and recreation. The choice of the site as the venue for the 2022 Winter Olympics, announced in 2016, was decisive in propelling this transformation forward. The Shougang conversion strives to re-enliven the steel works, which commenced operations more than a century ago, while reconnecting the city with the Yongding River and restoring the heavily damaged natural environment. The colorful, eye-catching Big Air Slope emblemizes the young, dynamic sport, and can alter its profile to accommodate further sport types. The target area and part of the stadium, with its 5000 seats, are buried in the lake. For the adaptive reutilization of the former oxygen factory as a service building for spectators in Beijing in 2022, and as a sports and recreational facility, the original structure of the large factory building has been preserved and new floors added. Preserved as well is the structure of the ventilation station, while structural interventions into the four additional factory buildings accommodate a multifarious mix of utilizations. Additional adjacent industrial structures, among them the fractionation tower, numerous storage cylinders and spheres, have been preserved, decontaminated, and refurbished. Even after the Winter Olympics, this event venue will remain a stimulating and intriguing destination for visitors, enhancing the attractiveness of the region as a whole.



With its dynamic form and Olympic color scheme, the slope soars upward, a horizontal landmark that lies in the shadow of the preserved cooling towers of the old steelworks, and directly in front of the striking silhouette of the western Xīshān Mountain Range on the horizon. Photos: Brian



To convince the Chinese authorities of the project's national value, the architects compared the shape of the slope to the old Dunhuang fresco paintings, with a Buddhist god flying into the air.



#### Zhang Li, Big Air Shougang is located on the industrial heritage site of a former steel plant in West Beijing. How is it situated in relation to the city?

Beijing is growing. When I was born in 1970, the city was about one fifth its present size. Shougang is 20 kilometres from the centre, and is regarded as a separate region, but in practical terms, it has been absorbed by the city. The masterplan of Beijing is made up of the concentric circles of the ring roads; Shougang – 10 square kilometres of empty factories – is located between the fifth and sixth rings.

#### What does this place mean to people?

Shougang is the capital city's steel plant, built in the late 19th century as the first factory on this scale. In the 1950s, it was an iconic symbol of China as a rising industrial power. Since the 1980s, it hasn't been regarded as a pioneering industry, and in 2010, production was moved to Hebei Province. But the place means a lot for the memory of industrialisation in China.

#### The development is not intended solely for the Winter Olympics?

The transformation is taking place in three parts: the first is centred around the Big Air venue, along with the cooling towers and the cooling lake. It includes the redevelopment along the perimeter of the lake, as well as the conversion of an oxygen factory. The second part comprises office buildings for the organisation committee. The third part consists of training centres for the Chinese national winter sports team, including skating, ice hockey and other sports. Whereas

the reuse of industrial heritage is a familiar theme, the incorporation of an Olympic competition venue is new. This gathering of resources and the tension that accompanies this international event helps to drive the overall renovation and reuse of the site and its reintegration into the city.

#### Do you see the project less as architecture or event and more as creating a public space?

The game is just a temporary, short-lived event. The Olympic Games are a big attraction in China and can initiate the impetus to reintroduce life into a place that was formerly used by industry, not residents. To demonstrate its value as a project, we need to have viable urban life here in the coming years. To be a meaningful destination, a public space has to meet what we call the "two-and-a-half hours principle". Meaning the potential to attract ordinary city-dwellers who will spend two and a half hours in a particular place. To do this, you need multiple kinds of activity: leisure, walking, seating, views, spaces for meeting and the exchange of information. The combination of such experiences in a certain rhythm adds up to "two and a half hours".

#### Beyond the 2022 Winter Olympics, how will Beijing benefit from the project?

On the slope alone, we cannot create a "two and a half hour" experience. Ordinary people cannot use it. But we do achieve this with the renovated oxygen factory, which is very much like a district, with industrial cylinders and modern buildings in between. It has been converted into creative industry office and retail space and cafes. And along the lake, we have created various

facilities and open spaces that offer views and seating places as well as walking paths that extend onto the water.

#### How did the abandoned industrial structures inform the project?

To host urban events and adapt to the daily lives of users, you need to break down the scale and divide spaces into smaller, interlinked ones. And you need to accommodate flexibility. Such spaces should serve multiple purposes and be adaptable to change while responding to the human scale and should respect current modes through which people work and live together.

#### The project relies on reuse as opposed to demolition; the slope is dismountable. What are your thoughts on sustainability?

Regarding the conversion, we wanted to retain as much of the existing structure as possible, although it is more expensive, but this financial investment has resulted in environmental gains. The new volumes, which are set perpendicular to the original structure, were added without giving them too much additional load. Furthermore, every part of the slope is reusable. It is assembled as a prefab structure and can be completely disassembled. We always try to think long-term, not to design simply for specific programmes. If you only design for a specific programme, it becomes outdated by the time it's been built.

Zhang Li is the lead architect of Atelier TeamMinus

## Special prize

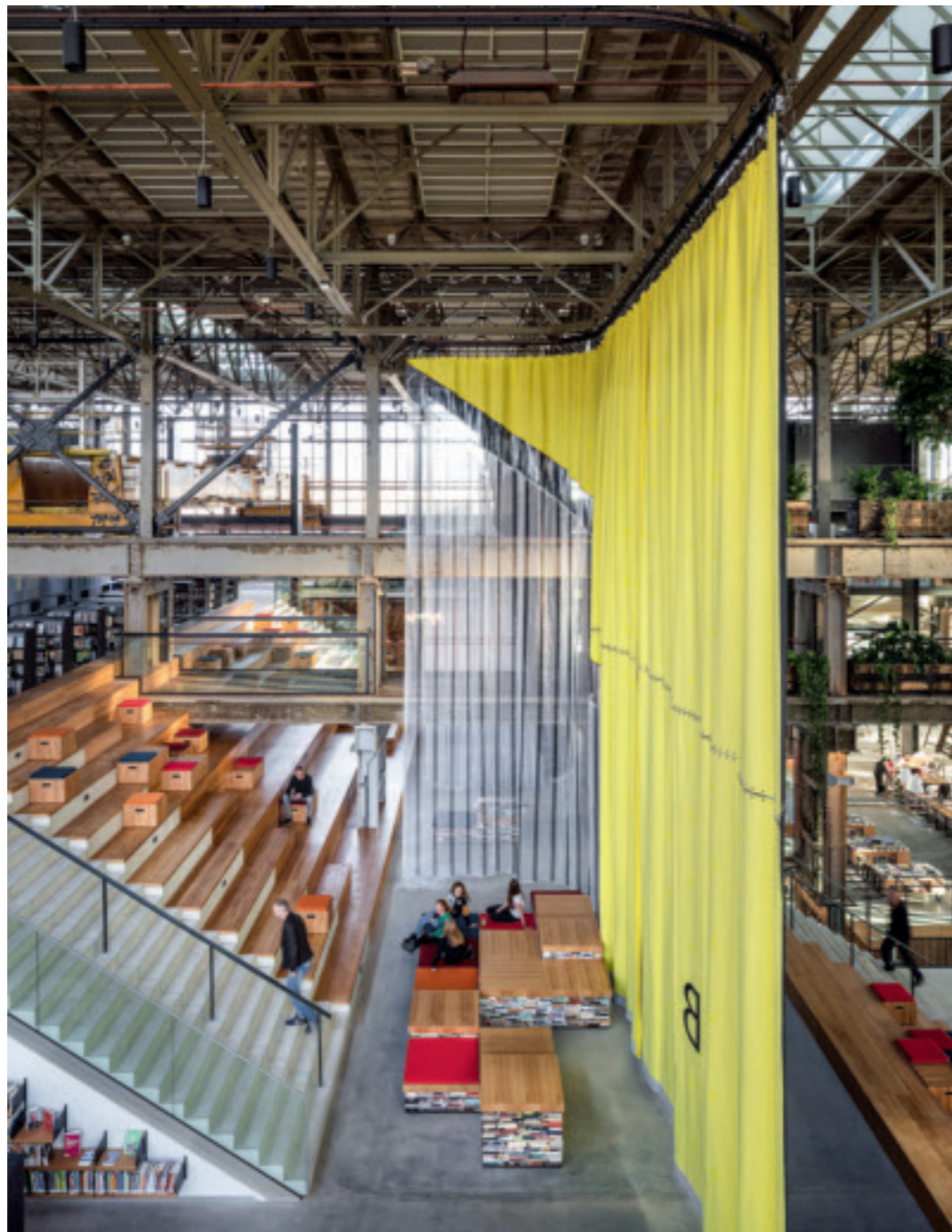
### LocHal, Tilburg, 2019

Civic Architects, Amsterdam



Tilburg's new library – which occupies a former train shed where the train tracks were formerly located – accommodates a variety of functions. In addition to a traditional library, this new venue contains co-working spaces, conference rooms, arts education studios, and a large hall for events. In the city of Tilburg in the Netherlands, Civic Architects have converted a former locomotive hangar into a public library. Emerging at this central location in the immediate vicinity of the train station – albeit on the opposite side of the tracks in relation to the old town—is a new urban district with versatile functions. Created in the pre-existing hall, which dates from 1932, by means of just a few installations is a place of public interaction. With its height of 15 meters and a service area measuring 90 x 60 meters, the LocHal is virtually a roofed town, whose surfaces are used not just by the library, but for co-working facilities and art organizations as well. Inserted into the original black steel and glass structure is a concrete/timber staircase landscape that provides visitor access to the gallery and reading areas. In addition to circulation, the stairs serve as a zone of contact with seating options, and are usable as grandstands. The uppermost level offers a panoramic view across the city. The project makes a significant contribution to the reinvention of the urban library as a space of encounter and communication in the broadest sense. This marvelous conversion makes appropriate use of the existing structure, generating a highly effective indoor public space characterized by spaciousness and variety.

Six large, adjustable curtains facilitate the flexible subdivision of the spaces. The curtains enhance the diverse climate zones and improve the acoustics. Photos: Stijn Bollaert

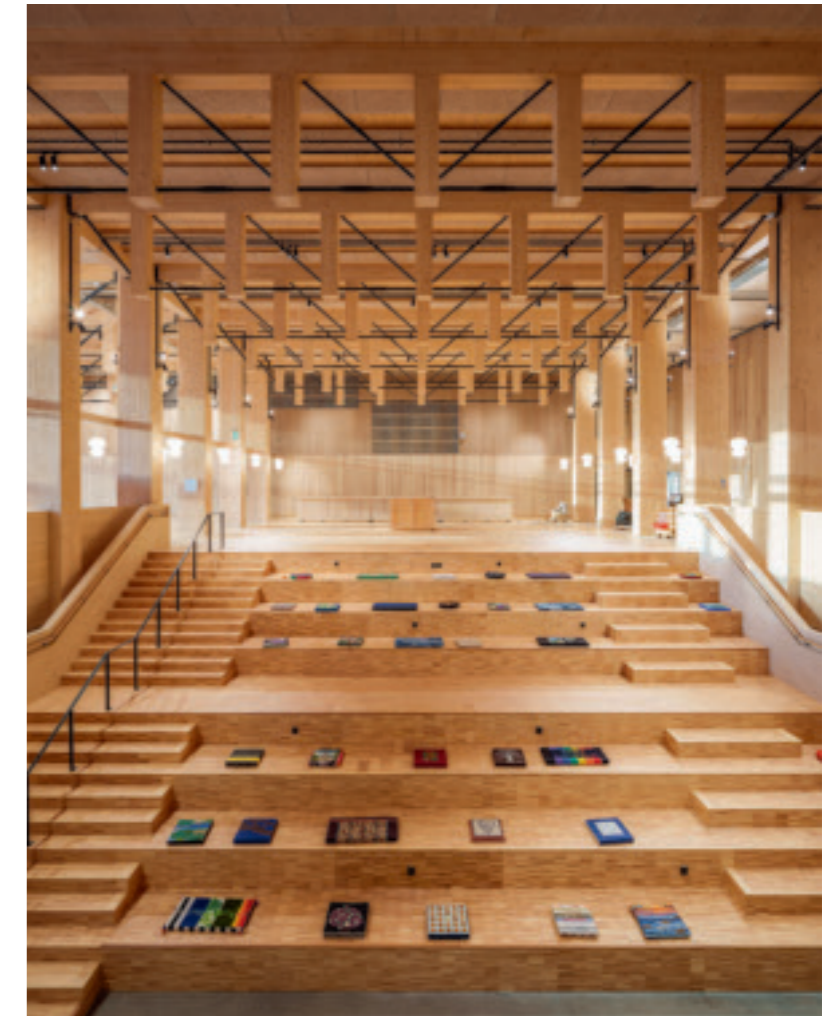


## Special prize

### Sara Cultural Centre, Skellefteå, 2021

White Arkitekter, Stockholm

The Sara Cultural Centre in Skellefteå in Northern Sweden is among the tallest buildings worldwide to be constructed entirely in timber. With a point of departure in the traditions of this city, the building represents a step into the future for this midsized city, which expects to grow in coming years. A timber-frame building with glue-laminated timber pillars and beams, this innovative, sustainable pioneer project – which relies upon local materials and regional craft expertise – showcases the potential of wooden construction. The Cultural Centre alters the scale of the city while uniting a multiplicity of functions. The 20-storey high-rise contains a hotel whose glazed facade offers expansive views across the city. The flatter cubic structure accommodates cultural facilities. Situated on the ground floor are the hotel lobby and library, with the grand staircase positioned in between as a place of public encounter. The choice of materials is perceptible within; the characteristic wood and steel ceiling construction allows for open, flexible spaces. Found on the second storey are six variously sized stages, flexible lobbies, as well as exhibition areas. The lower building terminates above with a restaurant with roof terrace. Sara is an eye-catching landmark, a groundbreaking achievement that dramatically modifies the dimensions of this small city while providing a social and cultural amenity in this harsh climate. With its rich variety of programs, it connects people to activities that may have been out of reach formerly. With outdoor public spaces for the summer months as well, this is a highly attractive, welcoming, and commendable project.



The Sara Cultural Centre comprises multiple functions: auditoriums, exhibition spaces, a library, a hotel, a restaurant and spaces for public administration.

Photos: Jonas Westling (top), Patrick Degerman (bottom, left) Åke Eson Lindman (bottom right)

