



PREMI EUROPEU MANUEL DE SOLÀ-MORALES 2017

Report of the jury

The first edition of the European prize granted in memory of Manuel de Solà Morales can be considered as a significant success in terms of the participation of recent graduates from doctoral programs in urbanism and urban studies. The jury has considered a total of 48 dissertations defended in 24 universities belonging to a dozen countries – Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Switzerland.

Taken together, these theses give an excellent view of the new tendencies emerging in programs with rather diverse affiliations, from schools of architecture to departments of urban or social studies. They reveal a concrete attention for existing territories and social processes, and a widely-shared interest for infrastructure and landscape. Whether more centered on historical investigations or on the observation of current trends and practices, these investigations are in most cases based on the production of original representations, and articulate brilliantly visual and textual materials. Even if some national or local patterns emerge, it could safely be said that a European school of urbanism is currently taking shape, based not only on shared ideas and methods, but also on an increased mobility of scholars, instructors, and students.

Among the 48 dissertations submitted, the jury has unanimously selected four finalists, and then a winner amongst them. Based on the remarks of the three members, the following statements reflect their shared positions. There is no hierarchy among the finalists, who are:

Viviana d’Auria, who wrote her doctorate under the supervision of Bruno De Meulder at the Department of Architecture of the Catholic University of Leuven.

Entitled “Developing Urbanism[s] in Development. Five Episodes in the Making of the Volta River Project in (Post)colonial Ghana, 1945-76,” her thesis is outstanding research on urbanism’s shifting terms of reference, seen through the lens of the radical re-structuring of the Ghanaian territory during its transition from the colonial domination to the status of independent nation. The study focused on

the Volta River Project, a notorious large-scale development scheme implemented in freshly-independent Ghana, -yet rooted in programs shaped in colonial times. The dissertation not only produces valuable knowledge about the theme, dealing with designs, and also with their translation in the media of the time, but also formulates a consistent and critical discourse on current urbanistic approaches in non-Western contexts.

Francisco Javier Castellano Pulido, who wrote his doctorate under the supervision of Juan Domingos Santos at the University of Granada.

Entitled “El patrimonio fértil. transferencias entre el paisaje agrario y la arquitectura en los crecimientos urbanos,” his thesis has an extreme relevance in our uncertain contemporary world as it deals in great detail with the changing climatological and environmental conditions of spatial production, especially in the threatened areas surrounding the large cities. The research strategy deployed is not only systematic and consistent, but also defines a new perspective on the ways in which fertile spaces have been thought upon in a highly-urbanized environment, and can be reconceptualized today. The thesis explores in a critical manner the different aspects related to these types of territories, from land ownership models to city-planning movements like the garden-city or the linear city, and from emergent movements to top down strategies. This is an important contribution to the knowledge about the production of spaces in urban contexts in general, support by exceptionally well-conceived visual materials.

Marta Labastida, who wrote her doctorate under the supervision of Maria Goula , Álvaro Domingues and Vincenzo Riso at the School of Architecture of the Universidade do Minho.

Entitled “El paisaje próximo. fragmentos del Vale do Ave,” the thesis focuses in an innovative way on models of proximity in the diffuse landscape, embracing one of the main conditions of contemporary urbanization. Both the theoretical part and the case study are of high scientific value and of great relevance in terms of project for the disciplines of urban design, urban planning and landscape design. The focus on the daily, variable, multiple, unfinished and provisional character of the landscape is not only accurate but also leading to new insights and adding to Manuel de Solà-Morales’ concept of “sets of relative distances” that she used to unfold the research, and which could be subsumed by the aphorism: “*En las distancias cortas es donde se resuelven las grandes cuestiones.*” The thematic cartography is of outstanding quality and will help many researchers and designers to read the world we inhabit and to transform it.

The prize has been given to Éric Alonzo, who wrote his doctorate under the supervision of Antoine Picon and Sébastien Marot at the University of Paris-Est.

Entitled “ L'architecture de la voie. Histoire et theories,” the thesis is an outstanding research on a particularly important, yet overlooked aspect of urbanism and landscape: the road in its multiple understanding, as a built artefact, as a landscape-related device, and of course as a conductor or fluxes. For each of these three approaches, together defining a very clear paradigm, the thesis reviews historical and contemporary references of theoretical, as well as practical nature, introducing a critical reflection on the provocative absence of the road in many urban design or landscape theories. The volume reviews the attitudes that have led to the abandoning of the concept of the road, to its possible permanence and to its expected re-composition. An extremely rich palette of references is deployed, from Leone Battista Alberti to Louis Kahn, from Giovanni Battista Piranesi to the Alison and Peter Smithson, among the architects, and from Reyner Banham to Sébastien Marot, among the theorists, shaping in this way a rich scientific body of knowledge that surpasses its already impressive encyclopedic value by providing a critical discourse on the value and meaning of roads as a theoretical, practical, as well as a conceptual construct. The thesis will pave the way for far-ranging future projects and studies, and will probably become a handbook for years to come. The relationship of this rigorous and precise observation of the streets and the roads with the passions and the designs of Manuel de Solà-Morales could not be more obvious.

Jean-Louis Cohen

Maria Rubert de Ventós

Kris Scheerlinck

Barcelona, March 13th 2017