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art

Museum,
Barabara
Paris pavilion,
Ljubljana
Jungee jump
platform on
water tower,
Tokyo
Public
Centre, Lviv
Hotel,
Bernacken
Department
store extension,
Graz

Ready

—Camping
ground,
Rimigliano
Natural Park
Auditorium
and theatre,
Villajoyosa
House, Salzburg
Urban inter-
vention, Bilbao
Temporary
theatre, Iași
—Cultural
centre, Aarhus
—School of
Economics,
Murska Sobota
—Outlet store,
Metzingen
—Town houses,
Amsterdam
—Cinema, Liège

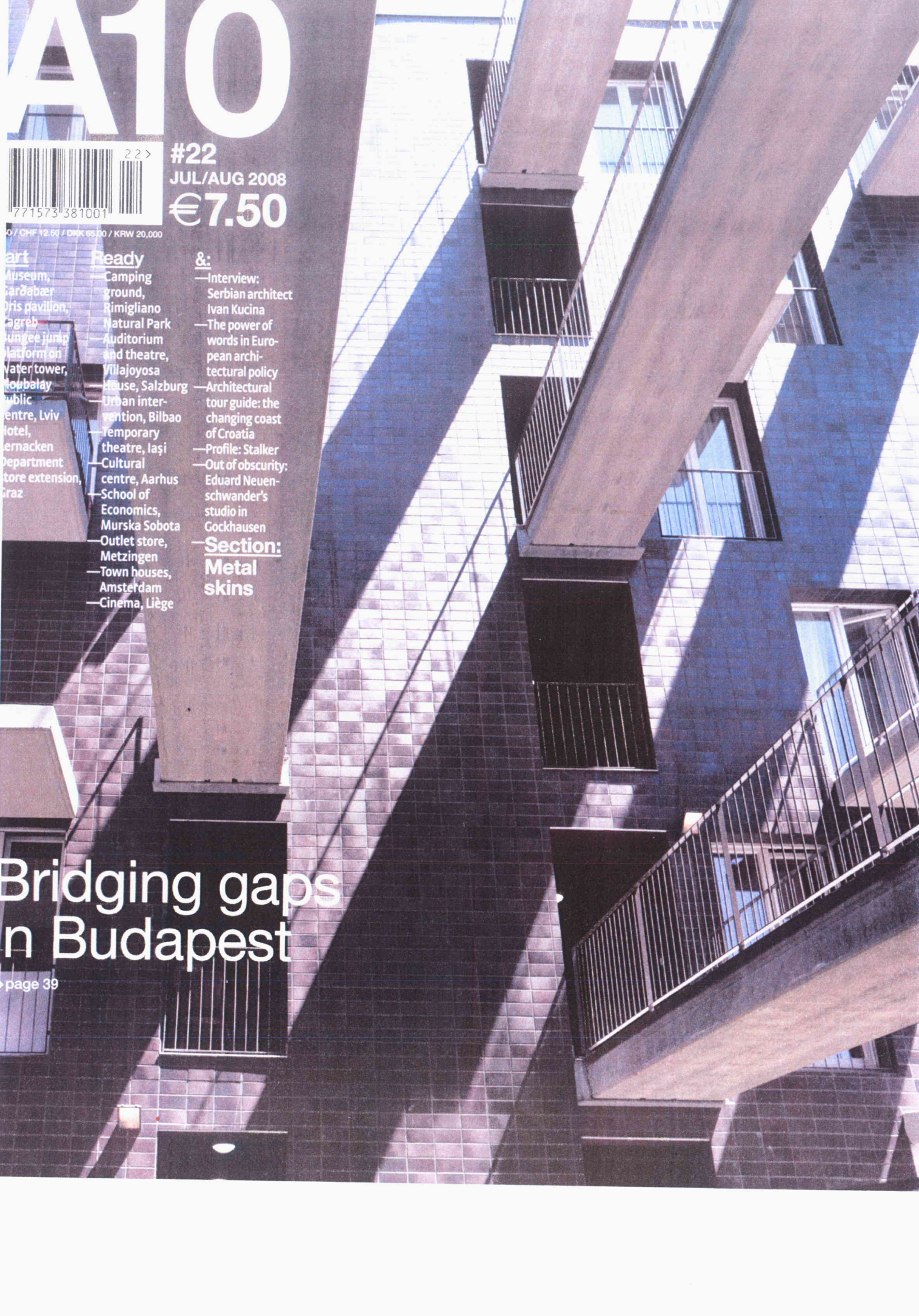
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Serbian architect
Ivan Kucina
—The power of
words in Euro-
pean archi-
tectural policy
—Architectural
tour guide: the
changing coast
of Croatia
—Profile: Stalker
—Out of obscurity:
Eduard Neuen-
schwander's
studio in
Gockhausen

Section: Metal skins

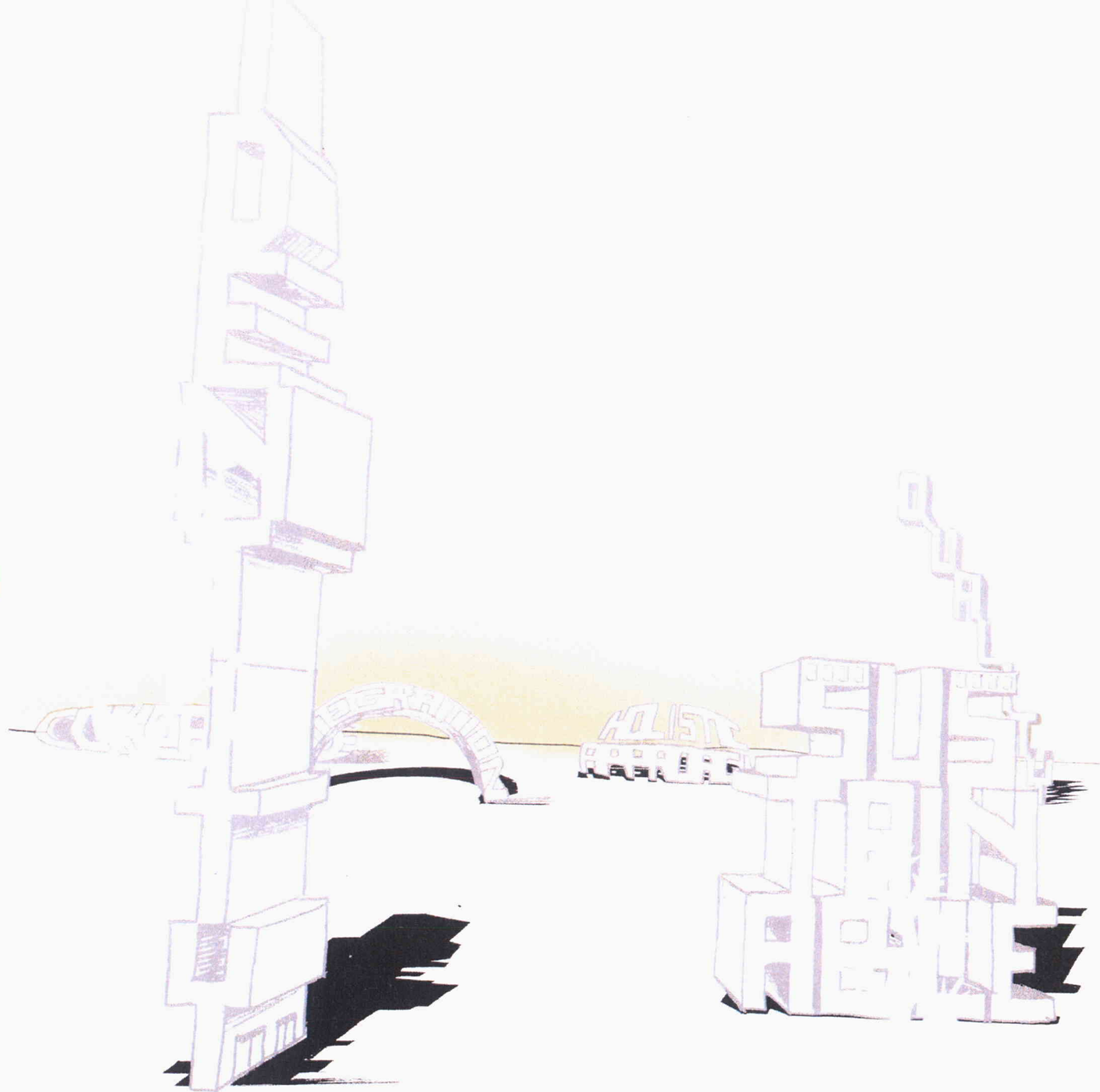
Bridging gaps in Budapest

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Eurovision

Focusing on
European
countries,
cities and
regions



The power of words

The architectural consequences of European unification are not confined to buildings, Erasmus student exchange programmes and European rendering, but are also visible in a superabundance of words. A key player in this invisible architecture is the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE).

TEXT: HANS IBFJINGS, ILLUSTRATION: PAUL HAASSEN

Unseen by the general public and even by a many professionals, architecture is being actively promoted in Europe. How exactly it is being done is difficult to say, but that something is happening is indisputable. Equally indisputable is the major role played by ACE, the Architects' Council of Europe, and close ally EFAP, the European Forum for Architectural Policies. Of the two, ACE, the result of a merger in 1990 between the Liaison Committee of the Architects of the United Europe and the Council of European Architects, is the more obvious lobbyist. ACE promotes the interests of 450,000 architects in the EU, EU accession states, Switzerland and Norway.

ACE's principal function is 'to monitor relevant policy and legislative developments at EU level, seeking to influence those areas of EU policy that have an impact on architectural practice and on policies affecting the overall quality and sustainability of the built environment.' Its promotional activities are directed both at representing the interests of the profession and at the quality of the built environment in general, as evidenced by its stated aims: 'promoting architecture in Europe, advancing architectural quality in the built environment, ensuring high standards of qualification for architects, advocating quality in architectural practice, fostering cross-border cooperation, facilitating European practice and acting as the single voice for architects in Europe.'

The aim of EFAP, headed by Rob Doctor, director of the Heritage Institute in Rotterdam, is similar but its approach is less direct. The European Forum for Architectural Policies describes itself as 'an informal network, which brings together government administrations, the profession and the cultural institutions in all EU member states and at European level. Its objective is to encourage exchanges of views and experiences in the promotion of architectural policies designed to enhance building urban and landscape quality, and more generally the quality of the living environment, at both national and European level.' At its constitutive meeting in Paris in 2000, it formulated a Resolution on Architectural Quality in Urban and Rural Environments in Europe which was subsequently adopted by the European Council of Ministers (on 12 February 2001).

EFAP's three main aims are 'to constitute a permanent structure for coordination and concerted action at European level, permitting the exchange and the discussion of different initiatives in favour of urban and architectural quality; to set up dialogue with the different bodies of the European Union and ensure increased consideration of architecture in texts, programmes and all the different facets of community policies; and to take concrete steps, set up common tools and encourage partnerships with other European structures.'

Strategy

Declarations, dialogues, working groups, forums, pro-

policy. And, as with EU enlargement, the rule seems to be: having said yes to A, you commit yourself to the rest of the alphabet. Once a discussion about entry has begun, it is no longer a question of whether a candidate country will become a member of the EU, but when.

This fait accompli strategy of gradually building on, and repeatedly referring back to, what has previously been laid down, is the approach followed by ACE, as the final declaration of its 'Designing for the Future: The Market and Quality of Life' congress held in Brussels earlier this year makes clear: 'Building on the spirit of the Bristol Accord on Sustainable Communities and the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities, and in the context of the EU Treaty concept of Territorial Cohesion, the Conference overwhelmingly agreed the Brussels' Statement.'

The crux of that Statement is: 'Architecture is a positive tool in steering investments towards sustainable development; developing cities demands an integrated, holistic approach, with input from politicians, architects, developers and civil society; planners, designers, the construction industry and end users must work together to create and maintain a quality built environment to provide solutions for sustainable cities; public procurement at all levels should be used to promote sustainability and quality, and particular attention should be given to rectifying the current misuse of public-private partnerships.'

These are sentiments it would be difficult to find fault with and as such the statement is representative of the congress where speaker after speaker used words like sustainability, integration, identity, quality and coherence. Of the four hundred politicians, administrators, and representatives of professional organizations present, no one felt called upon to argue for incoherence, waste or disintegration.

Advocacy

The congress was held within walking distance of ACE headquarters which are housed behind the unassuming facade of a former private house in a side street off Avenue Louisa. It is from this base, under the leadership of Alain Sagne, that ACE endeavours to put architecture in the European spotlight. And by its own account it is having considerable success: 'Efforts developed notably by the ACE in advocacy activities, either on its own and directly and/or through its involvement in other initiatives such as, the European Forum for Architectural Policies (EFAP), have started to produce visible and tangible results. This is evidenced, in particular, in the reference made to architectural quality in the Strategic Objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy as an important element that contributes to enhancing the attractiveness of cities and regions and hence their competitiveness. The most prominent and far-ranging evidence of progress is the high profile that has been given to architectural quality in

Parliament. The recognition of the role of EFAP is another benchmark.'

The Leipzig Charter, written during Germany's chairmanship of the EU in 2007, is regarded in these circles as a key document because it prioritizes quality, sustainability and innovation in European cities. It provides both ACE and EFAP with useful starting points for their promotion of architecture and architectural policy.

Messages

ACE cleverly promotes the interests and objectives of its professional group by taking a many-sided approach to architecture. One of the '21 Key Messages for the 21st Century' it drew up in 2004 was: 'Given its significant impact on the prosperity of the EU economy and on society, the construction sector, in all its facets, deserves a high priority in the policies of the EU.' Hence ACE's involvement in the European Construction Technology Platform. It also participates in the European Council for Research, Development and Innovation which in turn is related to the Lisbon Strategy, which was drawn up during the EU summit in Portugal in 2000, and which looks forward to Europe being the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world by 2010, while maintaining its social welfare model and pursuing sustainable growth. In light of this, the Leipzig Charter and ACE refer in turn to the 2005 joint cohesion policies for investment, growth and jobs in the member states that are intended to contribute to 'the attractiveness of cities and regions and hence their competitiveness.'

And so everything is interconnected, everything refers back to something else, thereby forging ever stronger ties in what is for outsiders an increasingly incomprehensible, self-referential complex of words. However incomprehensible this complex may be, the words are not to be taken lightly (certainly not by someone who believes that one word can sometimes say more than a thousand images). Step by step, ACE is preparing the ground for acceptance of an idea that is starting to look increasingly inescapable, perhaps not to Europe's 450,000 architects who already believe this, but certainly to the much smaller body that formulates European policy: that architecture matters in Europe. ←

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