

# REVITALIZATION OF CHARLES SQUARE

PRAGUE - CZECHIA - CENTRAL EUROPE

SQUARE OR PARK? ITS FUTURE IS IN DIALOGUE.



Current state of Charles Square (in Czech: Karlovo náměstí)

Charles Square is an important public space of the City of Prague. From its beginning, Charles Square has been a major crossroads. Originally called the Cattle Market, it was established by Charles IV in the fourteenth century as a pilgrimage site with the Chapel of Corpus Christi and a major marketplace. The park you can see today was built in 1884 according to the design of landscape architect František Thomayer, who, in keeping with global trends, aimed for creating a quiet, green oasis in the city centre.

Since that time, it has become increasingly difficult for the two opposing functions of the square to co-exist, primarily because of the continual increase in automobile traffic and public transit. Today, the park is in poor condition, but the original well-conceived composition of modelled terrain, trees and other vegetation is still clearly visible. In 1998, it was declared a cultural monument of landscape architecture. It therefore carries the same degree of protection as many historic buildings in Prague.

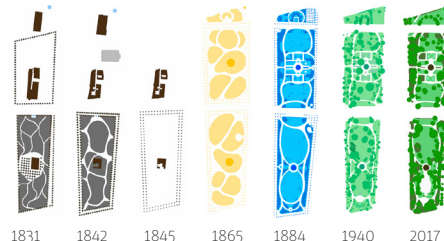
## FIRST EFFORTS TO REVITALIZE THE SQUARE

Efforts to revitalize Charles Square appeared in the 1990s, when the northern part of the square was completely transformed, but the result was not generally well received by the public and reconstruction work on other parts was stopped. In 2008, the Prague 2 city district announced a conceptual competition to shape the square, but none of the proposals were of sufficient quality to be awarded first prize, especially with respect to historical preservation of the park.

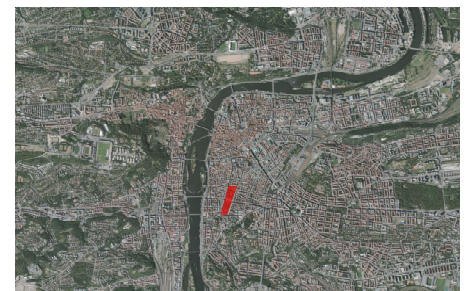
In 2013, one of the first tasks entrusted to the Office



Despite its reputation, the park at Charles Square is still a popular place.



of Public Space of the Prague Institute of Planning and Development (IPR Prague) was to work with the Prague Public Transit Company, which had been preparing a project of reconstruction of the tram tracks on the square. The new goal was to design a complete reconstruction of the streets and was named „Stage I“ of the revitalization. It immediately became apparent to everyone that ignoring the largest area of the square, the park, during the Stage I of reconstruction was not the ideal solution, but it was a necessary step because of the abysmal state of the tram tracks.



Charles square is located in the centre of Prague, in Prague 2 city district. It is 5 min walk from the Vltava river, 10 min walk from famous Wenceslas square.

## WHAT IS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE?

When speaking of a landscape or garden architect, in Czechia we typically imagine a person whose task is to design gardens. But that is just one small part of this broad field. The level of technological development and urbanization poses a serious challenge to humans: keep contact with the urban nature and landscape while not destroying it. Landscape architecture revolves around people and human perceptions and needs that can be met by combining garden art, environmental protection and construction. These are fields that often continue to be separated. A landscape architect is an independent profession crucial for sustainable city development, but still in many countries is hard for a landscape architect to get complex education or find employment outside the gardening art and ornamental landscaping. The role of landscape architect in designing landscapes, parks or public space is often assumed by architects, but in the majority of cases is simply missing. In other countries, however, this profession is already highly respected. The competitive dialogue for Charles Square was tasked with introducing the issue of landscape architecture in Czechia, raising public awareness, bringing leading landscape architects from Europe to Prague and putting together a capable team led by an experienced landscape architect to carry out the revitalization of Charles Square park. We believe it was successful in this endeavour and that this important field will soon become well established in the Czech republic too. Our landscape, both outside and inside the city, is high in the need of landscape architects.



Crosswalks are missing on all sides today at the intersection with Resslová Street. Pedestrians are forced to use the underpasses. The absence of crosswalks creates walked paths in the vegetation and lawns and thus directly contributes to degradation of the park. Trees and vegetation in historically moulded green belt encompassing the park are in poor shape due to insufficient maintenance and high pedestrians walks through.



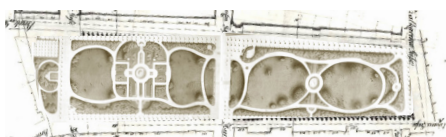
# REVITALIZATION OF THE PARK IN CHARLES SQUARE

NOVEMBER 2019

REHWALDT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS + BY ARCHITECTS + PROJEKCE DOPRAVNÍ FILIP

## DEVELOPMENT OF CHARLES SQUARE PROPOSAL

Charles Square is a major green area in the centre of Prague. It is simultaneously a square, park and garden. When considering the square's future, we must begin by looking at centuries of European, Czech and Prague history. The story of this square dates back to 1348 and founder Charles IV. Much later, park modifications were made by Bedřich Wünsch and then František Thomayer, and since that time new activities continue to take place in the city. The park reconstruction honours the current park and its historically protected legacy at all stages of its development. The newly proposed changes are very sensitive and do not alter the primary motifs of Thomayer's park. The design pays tribute to historical layers and stories, even those lesser known and hidden, not only in the overall concept but also in the details.



Historically protected park design by František Thomayer from 1884.

## DESIGN CONCEPT

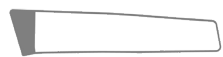
Running from „facade to facade“, the design calls for a solid urban frame with a soft landscaped core. The aim is to protect Thomayer's park while adding an active transition space—the urban frame. By improving and adding to the network of paths, it will be possible to comfortably pass through the square without damaging the green area. Selected areas are adapted for multi-functional use. Surfaces, furnishings and other elements are designed in relation to the significance and character of Charles Square. New buildings are an integral part of the frame. They are designed as subtle, transparent gazebos with covered terrace walkways.

## 3 LAYERS OF THE DESIGN

Street space and its border with surrounding buildings.



Urban frame incorporating a paved area in front of the town hall to create an interface between the city and park.



Preserved interior park space respects the historically protected landscaping from the nineteenth century.



## URBAN FRAME

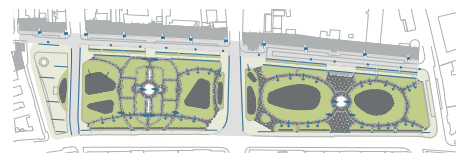
Charles Square is both an urban space and a park. This dual principle is embodied in the design as the notion of a permeable urban frame defining the two spaces while also connecting them. It is a promenade, a place to spend time, and a place of transition. The frame functions as an interface—it is the gateway to the park but also protects the interior. It consists of multiple elements—rows of trees, a sidewalk promenade, park benches, plants and minor architectural elements. This frame features the rhythmic alternation of open and closed sections. The recently added entrances improve the connection of the park with adjacent streets. A café and other facilities make it possible for all park visitors to comfortably use the public space.



A wider pavement and a new line of trees referring to Bedřich Wünsch's design creates a new rhythm in the street space. New trees also make sitting on the bench encompassing the whole park more pleasant, however, the bench provides for much more activities. It is followed by an extended staircase in the middle of the southern part of the park, which offers a comfortable entrance into the park.

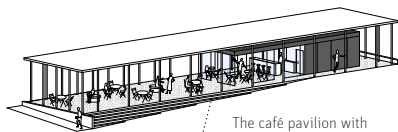
## VEGETATION FRAMING THE PARK

Charles Square is a space with valuable vegetation from different points in history. These historically valuable plants must be preserved to the greatest degree possible. In Thomayer's time, it was typical to use specific types of plant species, especially lilacs. This element will be retained in recognition of the „international style“ of the time. To improve the park's permeability, the design retains Thomayer's initial concept of „windows“ into the park. The green barrier of shrubbery is broken in places, but the basic structure of a peripheral wall is retained. This creates balance between open views and the closed green border of the park, which enhances people's perception of safe space.



## RAINWATER MANAGEMENT

During normal rainfall, water is absorbed by all green areas. During heavy rainfall, excess water is directed to sunken central areas to prevent flooding of the surrounding street. The slightly sloped park paths drain water towards planted areas, where the water is absorbed. The plants selected for the park's border are salt resistant and adapted to moisture so that rainwater from the streets can be retained. Ideally, rainwater from the roofs of surrounding buildings should be collected and after filtering used for irrigation.



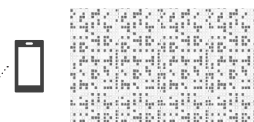
The café pavilion with lounge terrace is part of the urban frame and functions as a gateway into the park.



Play equipment is specially designed and refers to the history of the square.

## CULTURAL MOSAIC

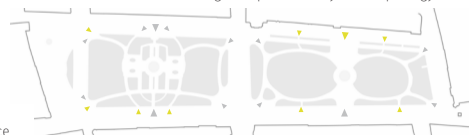
Any stories can be written right into the surface of the promenade. Typical Prague mosaic marble cobble stones laid like pixels into coded language, which can be scanned to learn about the history of Charles Square. Pavement can both hide and reveal the vibrant cultural mosaic of Charles square. The codes will tell various stories about writers and artists, locals and foreigners, famous people and unsung heroes.



Anyone can decipher the sidewalk with a mobile phone.

## PARK ENTRANCES AND PATHS

Multiple entrances to the park, changes in the layout of the paths and new paved areas increase freedom of movement within the square. Straight lines of trees run in the direction of transit along the edge of the park, while the fountain area is open and there are also quiet corners where you can relax. All of these changes respect Thomayer's morphology.



new entrance  
current entrance



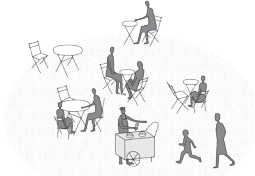
town hall square for markets and events



frame—promenade with places to sit



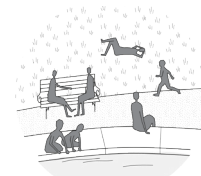
moveable stands and light, moveable furniture



lawns for picnics and active recreation



spending time by the fountain



roads and paths with classic benches



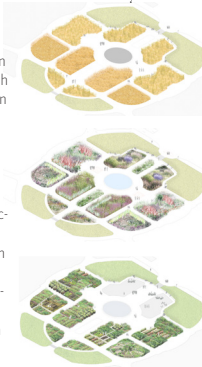
Masterplan of Charles Square 2025

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## GARDEN PATERRE

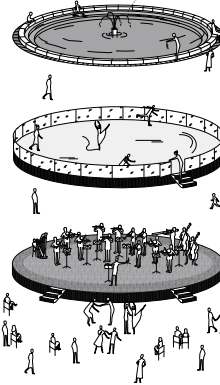
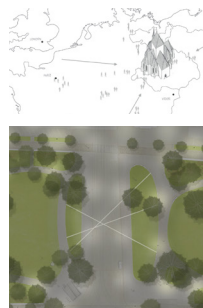
Gardening tradition from the nineteenth century rendered in contemporary language.

Flower beds in the central part will function as a colourful garden according to modern principles. Just as in Thomayer's time, temporary exhibitions will feature the latest trends in horticulture.



## CORPUS CHRISTI CHAPEL

A permanent light installation will quietly remind us of this important medieval chapel. Beams of light meet above where the chapel formerly stood, symbolizing the routes which pilgrims took to the chapel. These lines create a visible sign and join both parts of Charles Square.



The fountain can be transformed into a stage or skating rink.

## SQUARE MANAGEMENT AND PARK CARE

From a long-term perspective, the Charles Square project is only sustainable if it is embraced by the city's residents and receives suitable expert care. This is why the „Karloman“ has been created, a group that will function on two levels—one as the manager of Charles Square appointed by the city, the other as a collective of individuals volunteering to maintain the park. Karloman will also support the local community but isn't directly dependent on it. Karloman is not a single person but a collection of individuals and groups, including city administration, expert botanists, historians, teachers, students and others. Everyone must work together in planning exhibitions, cultural events, neighbourhood celebrations or other events. Karloman is the unifying element of the square.



The new paved area in front of the town hall creates a sizeable square that can be used for regular markets, weddings or other events.

## SOUTH PATERRE

Charles Square is a place for meeting and needs a defined area for selling refreshments and other daily needs. From this perspective, the new park centre will be the multi-functional fountain area and café at the southern end, where the city meets the interior park landscape.



## PHASING OF PARK RECONSTRUCTION

Cultural improvements to the square will be carried out in several phases. Before beginning the general reconstruction of the park, significant care will be devoted to valuable trees and shrubbery. Reconstruction of the park will be completed no later than 2025. This will be followed by long-term cultivation of vegetation and improved traffic flow. The project timeline runs to 2048, when we will commemorate the 700th anniversary of the square's founding. This celebration will be an ideal milestone for further improvements. This is the moment when the long-term vision of vegetation and improved traffic around the square should be complete. As long as there is civic and political will, changes to transportation can be made much sooner. Changes to the park link to reconstruction of the square's streets in Stage I. The proposal also considers several other ways to decrease traffic and provide greater connection of the park and surrounding buildings.





# WHAT IS COMPETITIVE DIALOGUE?

After IPR Prague completed the design of Stage I, it started tackling the park. Considering the several unsuccessful past attempts at revitalization, it was clear from the beginning that it would not be an easy task. The need for comfortable pedestrian movement throughout the square and a space for cultural and social events clashed with the desire to restore the listed park as much as possible. After long debates, an entirely new process was proposed that is much more flexible than a classic architectural competition. In Czech law system, it is called competitive dialogue and is useful in finding solutions for complex areas where there are many and often conflicting requirements. And when even the contracting authority, in this case the City of Prague, does not have a clear idea of what to want from the space. The basis of competitive

dialogue is common intersectional debate between all the parties involved - architects, landscapers, politicians, traffic engineers, preservationists, administrators, the public and others. It serves as a means to comprehensively understand the site, its nature and all problems in its complexity. This requires openness and the willingness to listen and respect the interests and needs of all stakeholders. In the initial stage, each stakeholder is expected to enter the discussion willing to accept compromise, potentially even a different point of view or solution than originally anticipated. The competitive dialogue included an introductory conference and then two workshops, and resulted in the proposal of five separate designs. Any party could voice their opinion during any stage of design (from the concept to the final design). Everyone,

including the relevant offices, were involved in the process from the start, i.e. from the very definition of the assignment, which gradually developed and was modified as designs and opinions evolved. Under this process, originally diverse opinions gradually converged and led to the creation of five high quality designs, the best of which was selected by a committee of experts. It is expected, as the authorities responsible for required permits were part of the whole process of creating and choosing the winning design, and thus have thorough knowledge of it, issuing permits will run more smoothly and the reconstruction itself will be able to start sooner than usual.

## HOW WAS THE WINNING DESIGN SELECTED?

Fourteen teams from all over Europe applied to take part in the competitive dialogue to revitalize Charles Square. Based on their professional approach to revitalizing the square, five were selected to join the process and simultaneously work on their designs. A full year of collaborative work followed, culminating in five high quality designs that were a pleasure to choose from. The winning design came from the team of the German landscape architecture studio Rehwaldt LA, Czech architectural studio BY architects and Czech transportation engineering company PD Filip. Designs were assessed by an evaluation committee primarily with respect to their architectural and landscaping quality, with an emphasis on enhancing the historically protected features of the park so that they can withstand current traffic at the square. The committee had help from several experts in different fields, such as transportation, cultural heritage, green space and rainwater management, etc.



## PARTICIPANTS IN THE COMPETITIVE DIALOGUE TO REVITALIZE THE PARK IN CHARLES SQUARE

(final proposals from October 2018)

### 1ST PLACE: REHWALDT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS + BY ARCHITECTS + PD FILIP

Germany, Czech Republic

Creative team members: Till Rehwaldt, Eliška Černá, Adéla Chmelová, Christiane Eberts, Mattes Hoffmann, Michal Michalski, Karolína Keller, Isabel Schergaut, Garth Woolison (Rehwaldt LA), Markéta Zdebská, Marek Žáček, Marie Čáslavská (BY architects), Filip Ondráček, Josef Filip, Pavel Soukup (PD Filip)

### 2ND PLACE: AGENCE TER + BREAK POINT + HBH PROJEKT + PHYTORESTORE + CONCEPTO

France, Czech Republic

Creative team members: Henri Bava, Helen Stokes, Jindriska Schiff (Agence ter), Tomáš Veselý, Martin Hajný, Diana Salahieh (Break Point architekti), Petr Sabadáš, Petr Skříčka (HBH Projekt), Julien Douesnard (Phytorestore), Fanny Gerard (Concepto)

### 3RD PLACE: BURO SANT EN CO + ATELIER M1 + PROMIKA

Netherlands, Czech Republic

Creative team members: Edwin Santhagens, Stephen Tas, Veronika Kunclová, Erfan Farahmand, Paul Plambeck, Sander Singor, Alexandre Parente, Jie Yang, Nina de Munnik, Siqi Li (Buro Sant en Co), Pavel Joba, Pavel Mahdal (Atelier M1), Šárka Veselá, Petr Pešťál (Promika)

### 4TH PLACE: GUSTAFSONPORTER + BOWMAN

Great Britain, Czech Republic

Creative team members: Neil Porter, Sibylla Hartel, Gilles de Wever, Androniki Strongioglou (Gustafson Porter + Bowman), John Henley (ETC Transport), Štěpánka Šmidová (Smidova Landscape Architects), Martin Scheuch, Robin Fremund (Sentient), Marek Ales (AED Project)

### 5TH PLACE: NEW VISIT

Czech Republic

Creative team members: Tomáš Jiránek, Marek Lehmann, Tomáš Kapal, Ondřej Černík, Kristýna Hradská, Jitka Jiráňková, Barbora Kolářová, Markéta Kubitová, Jan Malec



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