

What could be considered a successful city of tomorrow

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Introduction

I have just come from Veracruz, Mexico where I went straight to the airport from the concluding meeting of a UNESCO-UIA Conference on "Educational Architecture for an Architecture without Exclusion."

For me it was very important to be here, for three reasons:

- First, because Ekistics is now, more than ever, relevant. In a world where the built environment is not equitable, in a world where the built environment has become vulnerable, especially after the tragic events of 11 September, the thought-provoking processes that Ekistics initiates have much to add to any debate.
- Second, for meeting friends and being in an entourage that feels like family, starting with Panayis Psomopoulos, but also Mit Mitropoulos, Alexandros Papageorgiou Venetas, and so many others.
- Last, for personal reasons: This, my first ever presence at one of your assemblies, is the fulfilment of a sentimental journey for me. I was born into Ekistics, architecturally that is. My first ever job was with Doxiadis in Baghdad.

Let me say just one more thing about Ekistics. I sometimes feel that if Ekistics had not been created years back when it was, it would need to be invented today.

To conclude this introduction, I wish to say a few words about the UIA. The UIA, the only world organization of architects, has 102 member sections representing over 1.2 million architects. The organization is becoming increasingly influential and is the reference point for the international practice of our profession. Its close links and common programs with UNESCO, UNCHS, WTO, IOC and other world bodies make it a key player in shaping a better future for architects and architecture.

The events we organize can be big and far-reaching. Witness our congresses. In Barcelona in 1996 we had 10,000 registered participants. Mounted police had to be called in to disperse architects trying to get into halls already filled to capacity. It was then that we switched to the Isozaki indoor stadium. In Beijing in 1999, it was quite a sight to see young architects and students literally stampeding over auditorium seats just to touch Tadao Ando. Berlin, this coming July, promises to be a huge architectural happening. With its theme "Resource Architecture" it will also be a platform for debate on the future of architecture.

Cities and success

It was with great expectation that I heard the theme of this Conference – "Defining Success in the City of the 21st Century". The two operative words are "city" and "success." You have clearly approached the problem with a positive approach. This is how it should be. As Peter Elyard said during the UIA Chicago Congress, we have had enough with problem-centered approaches, we need a mission-directed approach. And the World Society of Ekistics has, with this Conference, set a mission – "successful cities."

We always like to think that we are at a crossroads or that we are crossing thresholds. This is good. It shows that our actions can bring results, can lead to better cities and to a more equitable built environment. It shows that we must not let the future happen but that we must continually shape it the way **we** want to and not the way others would like it to be.

I now want to put to you some aspects of what could be "success" in the city of tomorrow.

• Success No. 1: Lessen the social segregation of space

Our cities are full of barriers – social barriers, cultural barriers, economic barriers, and of course physical barriers, for example the segregation between affluent and poor districts. Barriers create frontiers. And frontiers create the dispossessed.

The situation is unlivable in most cities. Even the cities of

the developed world can no longer exist in watertight cocoons. Migration has changed that. The problems of the less developed world are on our doorstep. And we know that the realities of these cities, where the air is unbreathable, the water undrinkable and the waste unmanageable, are not too different from Dante's *Inferno*, the "città dolente" as he termed it.

So what can we architects do ?

I am convinced that we can have a role in the lessening of the social segregation of space. Fighting exclusion must become part of our regular professional activities. We must partake at the decision-making level and also facilitate "board-room" decisions to become action.

How?

- By helping important new buildings be sited in the less affluent parts of cities, thus creating a physical and social uplifting momentum. Architecture can thus become a tool for social reinsertion.
- By preserving and rehabilitating the cultural heritage of cities. Listed buildings are often located in underdeveloped areas. The process of caring for them and of creating space around them will inevitably lead to a sense of civic pride and thus lessen exclusion.

These are but two examples. What is important is to remember that space is our remit and also that space is political. And that we architects can be instrumental in lessening the social segregation of space by using it not only architecturally but also politically.

In the aftermath of the recent tragic world events, our role has acquired an added dimension. We will have to make good with less funds. Because, clearly, security and armaments, or defence as it is euphemistically called, will absorb a greater share of budgets, thus leaving less for what we cherish most – a better built environment.

I want to add a note of despondency. We architects are probably designing no more than 1 percent of the buildings of the world. It cannot be that we are not needed. I think that in the future we must focus much more on social housing and on architecture that is distanced from the "glossies" and answers the needs of the needy, the needs of cities away from their limelight areas. We can prove that quality is compatible with social architecture.

● **Success No. 2: Encourage the development of intermediate cities**

Intermediate cities, which are, in fact, the "great silent majority" of cities, can be the key to a more logical development. They can help lessen the catastrophic gigantism of the large metropolises.

It is worth remembering that intermediate cities should never be defined by their population but rather by their role in the specific context of their countries.

● **Success No. 3: Use judiciously the intermediate space within cities**

Whether one calls this intermediate space "brownfield sites" or "terrain vague," the answer can only be one. Judicious use of this space will liven up cities, will brighten the cityscape. Needless to say, it will also save "greenfield sites."

● **Success No. 4: Strive to ensure that housing be deemed a human right**

This is, of course, politically difficult to entrench, especially in

countries where laws exist in order to be implemented. But the de facto acquisition of shelter by more and more people, through social housing, self-help housing or in whatever other way, can lead to almost the same result.

The importance of security of tenure cannot be overstressed. One of its side benefits would be that citizens would care more for their cities.

● **Success No. 5: Work for the humanization of space**

We say a clear "no" to the globalization of culture. Our cities need the presence of our several cultures. We will, otherwise, witness an increasing lack of identity and humanity in our cities. And we are all fully conscious what this lack of identity and humanity entails. It entails a further diminishing of the quality of our lives.

Yet we know that, important as the preservation of our architectural heritage is, it cannot atone for lack of creativity. While it takes energy and courage to preserve one's heritage, it takes greater energy and greater courage to lead society towards an architecture that reinterprets culture in the form of contemporary architecture.

Let us also remember what Fredric Jameson said on space, following up on thoughts by the philosopher Wittgenstein: "We must ask ourselves whether we can think of spaces that demand new kinds of living, that in turn demand new kinds of spaces".

This can only mean human spaces, convivial spaces.

● **Success No. 6: Take the lead in collaborative endeavors to upgrade cities**

Architecture is a collaborative art. In the interdisciplinary teams that necessarily plan and direct projects and programs for cities, architects should have the lead role, they should be the first among equals, the *primum inter pares*.

What is the role of us architects in multidisciplinary projects? I strongly believe that it is in the best interests of society that we architects don the mantle of leadership. We are, after all, by our education and by the practice of our profession, best equipped to be the coordinators or, let us not be shy in our use of words, we are best equipped to be the leaders of the team and thus to ensure the continuum of culture and the creation of a "preferred" future. The continuum of culture, albeit so intangible, is of real public interest. It is our duty to convince authorities and public alike that this is a cornerstone of the existence of our several civilizations.

Conclusion

The future of the cities of the world can be in our hands. But we need a dream. For, as Martin Luther King said, "if you don't have a dream, you can't have a dream come true."

I consider it a happy coincidence that your Conference and Assembly are being held in Berlin, where next July the UIA will be having its 21st World Congress. We expect over 10,000 architects and students to be there.

In Berlin, we will need your intellectual contribution, we will need the compounded knowledge on architecture and town-planning that the World Society for Ekistics has acquired over the years. Your meaningful debate during our previous Congress in Beijing in 1999 is testimony to what you can offer.

Let us work closer together in the future. The UIA commits itself to this. You can also be assured of my personal dedication to common end results.