

London Festival of Architecture

CO-EVOLUTION

Opening speech at the Danish Embassy in London, 20 June 2008

By Henrik Valeur

We can all change the world! - And if we are really serious about fighting global warming, improving the environment and reducing pollution and resource consumption – we all have to do something.

I have lived in Shanghai for the past two years and in China it is like this: the government says sustainable development is very important and suddenly - from one day to the other - all projects in China are “green”, “eco-friendly” and “sustainable”. Of course they are not, but isn't it a bit the same here?

We talk a lot about sustainability but in terms of architecture and urban planning – which is what I know a little bit about - we are – let's say - at the very beginning. We have to learn a lot more and we have to make many more tests and experiments.

Sustainable urban development is really difficult. Not only because there are so many different aspects to consider, but also because all of these aspects are constantly changing!

However, the solution seems very obvious ... Because these are global challenges we should work together – globally – to solve them. This is the idea of CO-EVOLUTION; that by sharing ideas, experiences and know-how we might be able to develop new and more sustainable solutions for urban development.

By the way, I think COLLABORATION is a bigger and more important agenda – than sustainability!

In practice this is not so easy though. Not only because there are big cultural, economic, political ... differences, but also because we, as architects, were brought up with the idea that each of us is a genius and what we do should be something quite unique.

I am often being asked if these projects will be realized? No, at least not exactly like they are. But I can see that many of the ideas, sometimes even the entire schemes, are being copied.

And this is actually exactly what countries like China need – good solutions that can be mass-copied. Maybe we all need that. To be honest, our own ideas are maybe not always as original as we might pretend they are.

Collaboration is also difficult because as companies we like to keep our know-how to ourselves and earn money on our ideas. But if we really want to fight climate change, then we might have to give up some copyrights. It is a bit like if you want to fight AIDS, you can't ask poor people in Africa to pay hundreds of pounds for copy-righted medicine.

And we might have to give up the idea of architectural products being unique and every architect being a genius. It is really difficult, I can tell you ☺

But, if there's a will there's a way!

I am pleased we have in Denmark an institution like the Danish Architecture Centre who has the will and the resources - the funding and the intelligence - to do something about it.

I hope what they do - and what we did together with the CO-EVOLUTION - can be an inspiration of how we might create a better world.

Thank you very much!