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TEN POINTS FOR SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE POLITICS

1. THE BASIS

Today's philosophy and politics of sustainability arise from a new view of the relationship between humankind and environment. This view emphasises wholeness, the interdependence of nature and culture, and a long term time perspective.

The background to this is both material (population pressures, resource depletion and increasing environmental damage) and social (increasing global inequality in resource use as well as declining quality of life even in areas where material consumption is increasing).

This is a common basis which implies profound changes in all sectors of society. Architecture and planning are of particular importance. Not only does the building sector consume roughly 40% of all materials and energy consumed in our societies, as well as producing 35% of all the wastes, but it also provides the qualitative spatial framework for our lives, our activities and our relationships. A new, ecological architecture requires changes at all levels: for planning processes, building codes, environmental legislation, research priorities, and not least for architectural education.. It focuses on the following principles in particular.

2. ECOSOPHY

Sophos, logos and nomos correspond to the basic trinity of heart, head and hand. To be whole, we need a coherent practice where these three are in harmony. As regards the first, ecosophy (or ecophilosophy): settlements and buildings embody and express a certain view of the world and of society, whether this is explicit or not. Planning and architecture require an explicit recognition of the values and goals of the philosophy of sustainability, to ensure that they enhance those goals.

3. ECOLOGY

We must realise that the only basis for planning and architecture is the ecological basis. This requires the application of scientific and wholistic knowledge about ecosystems and resources. In particular it requires new methods for life cycle assessment, for end-use oriented energy systems, bioclimatological design, and knowledge of the many environmentally appropriate building materials and technologies which are already available today.

4. ECONOMY

Environmental solutions will only be applicable to a limited degree until our economic systems are redesigned for environmental sustainability. It is important for architects and planners to have a good grasp of the economic aspects and to contribute to developing alternative economic solutions and forms of material organisation which enhance social and environmental wholeness.

5. MULTIDISCIPLINARITY

One of the reasons for today's socioecological crisis is overspecialisation. Sustainability however requires wholistic solutions to problems and can only be achieved through cross-disciplinary work and insight. Our profession must develop more understanding of related disciplines such as engineering, ecology, economics and research science, and apply methods of cross-disciplinary work in design practice.

6. USER PARTICIPATION

Think globally, but act locally: sustainability can not be achieved without user participation. This requires of our profession that we develop working methods and design paths which specifically integrate users into the processes of planning, design and lifecycle maintenance of their built environment. Our role as architects and planners must be modified accordingly. In particular the image of the individualistic hero-architect needs to be outgrown.

7. TIME

Planning and design, like buildings, should be seen as processes in time more than as products. Sustainability also implies a much longer time perspective, in which our decisions and actions should have minimal impact on the natural and human possibilities of future generations. This also implies a different kind of planning and architecture, where use of renewable resources, durability, flexibility and recyclability must be basic criteria in our choice of planning and design solutions.

8. CONTEXT

Sustainability implies both nature, and culture. Architectural principles may be international, but not solutions; and historical traditions of building are our teachers and the necessary roots on which societies grow. Thus, in contrast to internationalisation, sustainable solutions must be contextually designed. Energy, local resources, climate, economy and culture are all contextual determinants. Local specificity and biodiversity are of essential systemic importance for human as well as for biological communities and natural ecosystems.

9. FORM AND CONTENT

Many attractive modern buildings are ecological disasters; whilst many modern eco-buildings are unattractive. Naturally both aspects are necessary. But the paradigm of sustainability requires that architects must learn to see differently. We must become less focused on formal solutions and more aware of the resource and consumption implications inherent within our choices of site layouts, transport systems, building forms, materials and technologies.

10. QUALITY

Planning and architecture should contribute to quality in a wholistic sense, that is on the functional, economic and aesthetic levels, to physical and spiritual health of individuals and communities and in an environmentally sensitive way. To contribute to a sustainable world, quality in this wholistic sense is what architecture and planning must be able to offer.

Most research and development efforts are still being directed towards new technical inventions aimed at solving the problems that technology has created. Architects should fight for much wider recognition of the fact that good solutions lie first and foremost in intelligent, environmentally sensitive design and planning, not in masses of new technology.

Architectural sustainable politics must focus on action, not talk, so as to integrate sustainability into professional daily practice; but to provide this quality requires, as a most urgent political priority, setting up new forms of architectural education which provide ethical awareness, cross-disciplinary skills, and modern scientific knowledge about building ecology.