

Meeting with all project partners in Shanghai.

Intro

First of all, I am very pleased you have all accepted our invitation to participate in this meeting, which is the real starting point for our project. We have worked on the preparation of this project for the past 5 months, having had numerous meetings both in China and in Denmark, making reports and feasibility studies, and a lot of planning and communication. So this is a very exciting moment for us.

A fairy tale

A number of people I have met and told about the project have spontaneously called it a fairy tale. I think you could look at it this way. Not that it is not realistic or relevant, because it very much is, but because it provides a rare opportunity to exchange ideas, knowledge and experiences between different cultures, which we should all take advantage of. It should be a project, which we will all benefit from. Now, coming from the land of Hans Christian Andersen I know that a fairy tale can have either a good or a bad ending. But I hope this project won't have an ending as such. I hope it will be the beginning of new and strong relationships between us all. This is one of the primary goals of the project.

Challenges and potentials

Another important goal is to develop models of sustainable urban development in China. The issue of sustainable urban development is not only very important to the Chinese government, but also to the ordinary people living in the cities. In fact, it is important to us all.

With 50 % of all construction in the world now taking place in China and maybe 400 million people moving to the cities of China within the next 20 years, China is also the obvious site for developing and implementing new and more sustainable models of urban development.

According to the Chinese Ministry of Construction: "We have to change our traditional mode of economic growth and urban development, boost recycling-based economy and protect our ecological environment in order to build resource-saving and environment-friendly cities."

Or, with some other words, how can we help improving the living conditions of the Chinese people without exhausting the very resources needed to sustain a better life?

Sustainability

What is sustainability? We have encountered many diverging definitions. Again, according to the Chinese Ministry of Construction: "Chinese cities are suffering from water and energy shortages, pollution, population expansion and insufficient infrastructure. Economic growth, social progress and urban performance in terms of ecological environment, city image and culture must be taken into consideration for sustainable urban development." How do we make sustainable development a common goal? And how do we promote a more inclusive urban planning practice?

A learning process

In that sense, this project is a learning process, which should facilitate the exchange of ideas, knowledge and experiences within the field of sustainable urban development. But it is also a learning process in the sense that none of us have probably tried exactly this kind of project before. Thus there is a good change we will make mistakes and since we, UiD, are responsible for making the process run as smoothly as possible, I would very much appreciate if you will let us know, if there is anything you think we can do to improve the process and the project. Better now, or during the process, rather than afterwards.

Results

Having said that it is learning process I would also like to stress that it is a process, which should yield some concrete results.

One group of Danish architects and one group of students and a professor from a Chinese University form a project team. Together they will create one project for sustainable urban development in the city of the Chinese university. Thus in total four projects. These projects must be both bold and visionary – we urge you to think big and out of the box – and, at the same time, they must be practically applicable and useful to planning authorities and developers in China.

We, UiD, will produce an introductory project to put the four projects into an overall conceptual context. We will also produce a documentary project of the process.

All of this will constitute the Danish, or a joint Sino-Danish, contribution to the Architecture Biennale of Venice

and the Architecture Biennale of Beijing.

Exhibition concept

Our vision for the exhibition at the two biennales, is a truly mixed media landscape, capturing the essence of the multi-reality urban landscape of the 21st Century. See our statements in the program.

Venues

1. Possible presentation to Danish and Chinese ministers in Beijing in May.
2. Presentation of the project at the UN Habitat World Urban Forum in Vancouver 19 -23 June.
3. Exhibition in the national Danish pavilion for the 10th Architecture Biennale of Venice, 10 September to 19 November.
4. Exhibition at the 2nd Architecture Biennale of Beijing, 26 September to 6 October.
5. Exhibition at the Danish Architecture Centre in Copenhagen.
6. Other possible exhibitions.
7. Catalogue and website.

Collaboration

With this project we wish to promote both international and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The Chinese universities will need to help the Danish architects understand the Chinese building and planning regulations, which may often differ from Danish regulations. But let's also remember that regulations can sometimes be changed by good arguments.

Arup, a global engineering company with the most advanced expertise in the field of sustainable urban development, will provide advice and consultancy to the project teams.

We are also trying to involve other possible consulting and manufacturing companies.

Organization

See communication diagram in the program.

The Process

After this meeting the Danish architects will travel to the Chinese cities where they are going to work. Here they should meet with the students (I understand there will be about 10-15 students at each university involved in the project) and together with the professors and their assistants they will initiate the research phase.

Important to have exchange between the group of Danish architects and the students and professors of the Chinese university. And between the Chinese universities themselves. And between the groups of Danish architects.

See time line in the program.

Time schedule

See time schedule in the program.

Continuation

The Architecture Biennale in Beijing and in Venice is where the program for this project ends, but – as I said – I hope that is not the end of the project.

Study trips for the Chinese students to Denmark, internships with architectural offices in Denmark and exchange programs with the Danish universities.

Real assignments and practical work for the Danish architects in China.

Lectures and workshops at the Chinese universities.

Expectations and ambitions

With this project we wish to prove to the world that it is possible to collaborate across cultural differences, and to prove the value of such collaborations. It is our hope that the project partners together, will be able to develop entirely new models of urban planning, to answer the global challenges of pollution and resource consumption.

Henrik Valeur, 2006