7th Sao Paulo International Biennial of Architecture

CO-EVOLUTION

Opening speech, 10 November 2007
By Henrik Valeur

I am sorry if I look a bit tired. I have been traveling 30 hours to get here from Shanghai – on the other side of the world.

Nevertheless, I am very happy to be here. I always wanted to go to Brazil – at least ever since I met this Brazilian girl in Barcelona many years ago!

I am – obviously - also very pleased we get the opportunity to show our CO-EVOLUTION project in Brazil, which is a country with a policy that clearly favors sustainable development - both socially, economically and environmentally – and with a very strong international voice on these issues.

As President Lula recently said: *The only more important issue in the world than trade, is climate change, and both are nearing a potential turning point. If nothing happens, we will go into history as a generation of politicians that failed humanity, especially the poor."*

As the United Nations have pointed out, climate changes will very likely be most damaging to poor countries, but it will certainly also affect the rich countries. It is therefore in the interest of all of us to work together to solve these problems, or – as the Chinese President, Hu Jintao, recently said:

"Faced with both opportunities and challenges, we must carefully think about and seriously answer the question of how to jointly build a sustainable future."

This is what we have tried – in our own modest way - to do with the CO-EVOLUTION project.

We asked four of the most talented young Danish architecture offices to work together with professors and students from four of the best Chinese universities, to develop proposals for sustainable urban development in four of the biggest Chinese cities.

As you can see at the exhibition, the results are both very visionary and very pragmatic.

And you can see how architecture can play an important role in the pursuit of a more sustainable future, because not only can architects wrap the somewhat boring environmental regulations and technologies in exciting design, they can also address a great variety of environmental, economic, social and cultural aspects with a wide number of experts and interest groups.

We believe, that this kind of international – and interdisciplinary – collaboration is the only way forward, if we wish to improve our living environment.

With more than half of the world's population now living in cities, and continuous economic and urban growth, we definitely need new solutions for sustainable urban development.

This was already recognized at the Earth Summit here in Brazil in 1992, where the environment was – for the first time – placed on the global agenda, and it will be further underlined at the upcoming Climate Summit in Denmark in 2009. But we also need concrete actions.

The environment is not only a political project. Today it is also mainstream business and potentially very big business.

There is a lot of business interest in these issues, which became clear to us when we made another exhibition in Shanghai recently, about Danish experiences with sustainable urban development. Apart from the Danish Ministry of Environment, The Technical University of Denmark and two of the biggest Danish Municipalities, this exhibition also included the participation of 15 of the leading Danish companies from the energy and environment sector.

It is clear that the developed countries must take on a leading role in the fight against climate change – not only because they are the greatest polluters, but also because they posses valuable experiences, know-how and technologies.

I must say though, that Brazil also possesses some very interesting experiences and technologies, and it would be very useful if we could also share this.

We are - at least - very open to collaborations with Brazil - and with any other country for that matter. Actually, we are currently looking for partners to establish a CO-EVOLUTION Center in Shanghai, as a platform for further international and interdisciplinary collaboration on sustainable urban development.

In this respect I also find it interesting that this event tonight is co-hosted by Denmark and Holland, which I consider to be two of the more progressive European countries, in terms of architecture and sustainable development.

As an example of that I would like to mention that Holland was awarded the prestigious Golden Lion at the architecture biennale in Venice in 2002. And that Denmark was awarded the same prize – for the first time ever – with the CO-EVOLUTION project last year.

I would like to thank the Danish Architecture Centre for making it possible and the Danish Ministry of Culture for financing the exhibition here in Sao Paulo. But most of all, I would like to thank the participants who actually created the exhibition, my own team in Shanghai and the four teams of Danish architects and Chinese professors and students.

Therefore, it is my pleasure to introduce Sinus Lynge, partner of EFFEKT – the Danish architecture office who worked together with Prof. Pan and his students from Tongji University in Shanghai – as the next (an final) speaker.

Oh yeah – if anyone knows this Brazilian girl called Liv, who was in Barcelona 16 years ago, please let me know!

Thank you!