Keynote Address: Diversity in Globalism

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The tone set for the symposium is cultural variety in face of globalization, as applied to design and urban planning. The theme, I think, can be reworded as diversity in post-modernity as expressed in *contemporary* art, architecture, urban planning, and other facets of culture.

Post-modernity is both contemporary, i.e. belonging to our time, and *contemporary* as applied to the cultural period starting from the 1970's to the present. It is quite different from the term *modern* as in the modern art movement which spans from about 1900 to 1970, and therefore very much part of history.

All this is quite confusing. And when you take into account that globalization has to go hand in hand with 'glocalism' you simply want to give up and stop talking to architects who are the worst of wordsmiths!

Glocalism is actually bad English. It also sounds terrible in French, 'glocalisme.' But, as an awkward hybrid between globalism and localism, it serves its purpose.

Let's leave that for the moment, and we'll come back to it later.

To appreciate the point-in-time we are in cultural history, that is the contemporary period with post-modernity as the underlying definition, the preceding modern period has to provide a contrast.

The two periods represent, not only the different points in time, but also two different philosophies which governed our behaviour and the way we see things whether we are designers, planners, music composers, performing artists, authors, or simple laymen. Their differences will be shown in a table at the end of this paper.

On the whole, I have a feeling that people at this symposium are made to eat too many 'cakes' and may therefore end up in some sort of intellectual indigestion! One of the numerous 'cakes' to be tackled is the question of cultural identities which face extinction in face of globalization. Much of it may be true; but much may also be debated. Culture and civilizations came and went long before any globalization. The pre-Columbian civilizations are the case-in-point. Moreover culture can be transplanted and resurrected as in the case of the USA which is an off-shoot of European civilization. (And you may say that about Australia and a few others although recent population mix may have made these countries culturally more pluralistic on a superficial level.)

But the present debate is not really concerned with established western-centric cultures. Rather it concerns those which are perceived to be 'far away' or non western-based cultures which need to be protected and somehow

brought into the fold of globalism. This is where 'glocalism' come in.

The foregoing is apt to be a simplistic and paternalistic view of culture or cultural identity. If, for example, we are given the job of planning a new town in the Angkorian region of Combodia, and supposing that we know in depth the Khmer culture, that their former cities and temples had to harmonize with the total or cosmic environment by emulating it and hence becoming themselves cosmological models, how do we then proceed when our perception of the environment is limited to a narrow physical and economic parameter? Short of plagiarization, all that we can do in this case is to emulate the hydraulic part of the Angkorian plan and to leave out its cosmological component.

I will not have time to go into urban symbolism the lack of which is the root cause of the poverty in present-day urban planning. However, if you wish to pursue it, I suggest that you look up my book 'Naga' which will soon be available in the French edition.

It is now time to try to define our contemporary world and culture in our time by contrasting them with their preceeding period involving the modern movement. The following tabulation contains key words which I have jotted down tentatively in the hope that my learned audience will be able to add and adjust, and, at the end of the three days of our symposium, come to a clearer understanding of what is meant by post-modernity and the contemporary.

Modern	Post-Modernity / Contemporary
1900 – 1970/80	1970/80 – present
Global	Glocal
Elitist	Democratic
Exclusive	Inclusive
Dogmatic	Open-endness of everything
Mainstream cultures	Equal importance given to sub-cultures of the indigenous, the minorities and the marginalized.
Polar	Multi-polar and coexistence of the opposites
Set rules	Flexibility, adaptability
Homogeneous	Pluralistic, tolerant of differences
Static	Dynamic, ever changing
Confucius	Tao
Planning as a system conforming to a coherent whole	Planning includes fragmentation, randomness and non-conformity.

Modern	Post-Modernity / Contemporary
Top-down planning	Bottom-up, grassroot, people-oriented planning and often self regulated
Simplicity, clarity, puritanical	Complexity, semi-anarchic, chaotic
CIAM and the Athen's Charter: Activity zones clearly delineated.	Zonal divisions blurred: multi-use, multi-layered 'zones'
Basically horizontal city planning	Vertical cities increasingly relevant. Planning becomes more 3-dimensional.

Mono-centric planning
    Rational
    Planned and finite
	Multi-nodal development
	Instinctine, intuitive
	Much of it unplanned and accidental with *collages.* (cf. Colin Rowe's *The Collage City*)

Comprehensive planning	Incremental planning
Berlin (rational)	Shanghai (chaos)
Fossil dependent	Sustainability
Urban renewal by *tabula rasa* *Plan Voisin*	Urban renewal: retention of memories with limited interventions
Historic conservation based on museum concept.	Adaptive reuse; recyclying; privatization of historical sites; intervention & juxtaposition with contemporary elements Reinvention and reinterpretation of history also exploited
History = memories of the powerful and the rich	History also encompasses memories of the common and marginalized people. Collective memory.
The world comprises nation-states defined by borders.	The world as Spaceship Earth (RBF/1950's), borderless

Table showing Modern vs. Post-Modern or contemporary culture

Bibliography

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