

Architects in the 21st century

– Agents of Change?

The annual symposium 2006 of the Nordic Association for Architectural Research was organized and hosted by the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture, April 20th to 22nd. Sixty-two architectural researchers from twenty-one institutions and companies in five countries participated.

The theme called for discussions of the potential of architects as agents of change in the complex world of today. The basic question was: “can architects contribute to society in new and better ways?”.

In the closing decades of the old century the architectural profession to some extent marginalized itself, the ‘*avantgarde*’ even relinquishing its social obligation. However, the skills of the architect are in fact particularly suited to deal with the complex problems of today. Basic to the architectural profession is the integration of various, seemingly antagonistic agendas into an unbiased whole. The architect knows, that her or his Building will be less successful, should one system - economy, politics, technology, functionality, aesthetics, etc. - dominate the whole at the expense of the others. The art of the architect is implicitly that of coordination, integration and harmony.

Can these skills help solve the many problems of the planet? Should the schools of architecture, the research centres, and the organizations of the profession e.g. emphasize the potential of architects as agents of a global change towards sustainability? Can the dialogue between architects and the universities, the media, industry, the political elite, NGOs, etc. be improved to the benefit of all? Is the present communication between the institutions and organizations supporting the profession sufficient to empower the architects with up-to-date tools? Can architects meet the new challenges of a new century with a new resourcefulness? And if so, then how? Or if not, what to do?

The discussions of the conference suggest new roles for architectural research in qualifying not only the education of architects but also the architectural profession on a planet in urgent need of change.

Thirty-one papers were presented in four workshops: *Avantgarde* discussing architectural utopias, visions and pioneers; *Social Responsibility* discussing architecture’s relevance, ethics, power, and politics; *Innovation* discussing creativity, transformation, and new technologies; and *Profession and Practice* discussing roles and arenas, education, and the future of architectural research in society.

The conference papers have been published collectively by the Royal Danish

Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture as *Agents of Change? Architects in the 21st century*, which is also available for download from the website of the Nordic Association for Architectural Research.

For the present issue of the Nordic Journal of Architectural Research the following four papers have been selected and reworked into articles presenting various approaches to the theme of the annual symposium 2006.

Ken Rivad

*Architect, PhD, The Scientific Committee (chairman),
The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture*