

HOW WILL THE FUTURE AFFECT ARCHITECTURE?

Our society is at a very delicate moment, at a crossroads.

And with it, our profession.

Cities, urban centers, where we mostly practice our profession, are at a critical time.

Our civilization has its origin in cities, which are a source of prosperity. Cities nowadays host 55% of the world population, and they will technically hold over 75% by 2050, so as we can see, they are also our future.

The built space and the public space are where we live, like the forum, the agora, the market, where we learn, where we heal, where we buy and sell, where we exchange culture and experiences.

And suddenly, we are forced to reduce our social life, to live more in our house and abandon, in a way, our streets, our squares, our neighborhood, our city.

Because of the virus, the city has been on standby.

On the other hand, the measures to contain the pandemic have forced us to transfer the city to the networks. Online work, e-commerce, distance learning, online entertainment, and social networks, have taken over the city space and time. Social relationships have been moved to the screen of the computer, tablet, or smartphone. And nowadays the algorithms are regulating our mood, our consumerist desires, or fashion aesthetics.

How can architects, urban planners, landscapers, and people related to our profession, face this moment?

I believe that to face this great change that is coming in our way, the capacity for adaptation and action of each one of us will be very important and that we must be fast and practical in taking decisions, and, at the same time, thoughtful and wise.

In a general way, I would summarize our future capacity for professional action as architects in three factors: diversity, knowledge and specialization, and evolution.

The first one is diversity.

Under the Sustainable Development Goals, there is a unanimous global consensus, about the guidelines and criteria we must follow. But, even working under these values, the world moves differently depending on the geographical location. And depending on the historical, cultural, economic, and social context.

For example, in Southeast Asia, due to demographic growth and the attraction of living in the city, new projects are emerging to fulfill the need for new neighborhoods and cities.

On the contrary, in Europe, there is a strong movement in favor of the restoration of the pre-existing urban layouts, supporting the urban reform processes of cities: to regenerate neighborhoods; to give new life to public spaces, and to give new uses to obsolete constructions.

The second of the factors would be knowledge and specialization.

Society is in continuous change. Architecture and urban planning have a limited capacity to adapt to the fast evolution of times. Words like; green, efficient, sustainable, recyclable, and natural, must stop being adjectives used before the word Architecture and become inherent to

itself. Architecture in the 21st century must include all these concepts in its very name and its practice.

We must be able to deepen in knowledge and focus our skills and strengths on a specific specialization.

And the third factor is evolution.

As architects, what values do we define ourselves as carriers?

We must take advantage of the paradigm shift to redirect our professional role: we must not be those of the spectacular and often capricious forms. These times have passed.

Now we must be bearers of the new values: efficiency, sustainability, mobility, a mix of uses, renaturation, gender equality, anti-racism, pollution control, living ecosystems, the heat island, the cycle of water.

We must learn how to work as a team and in a transversal way with other professionals from different disciplines. And we must contribute with the best of our knowledge and specialization so that our built environment is balanced and harmonious.

We have an uncertain future before us. And a becoming that will be marked by a virus. But it is not the first time that humanity has faced a pandemic, nor will this be the last. The human being has shown a great capacity for adaptation.

The holistic vision of the world of the _ architects can and should be the one that allows us to succeed in this delicate moment by making an important move towards a more sustainable and efficient build environment for a more balanced and healthier planet.

(*) Speech said by Guim Costa at the round table “Catalyzing change” at AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTURE