

# UIA -PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE COMMISSION

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## Responsibility of the architect within the context of increasing complexity in construction

During our previous presentation, December 2007, we tried to identify the origin of the increasing complexity in construction and the repercussions on the social, cultural and legal responsibility of the architect:

- at the planetary scale
- at the community scale
- at the client scale

We proposed to study several areas related to these different types of responsibility, whilst insisting upon the need for a more political approach:

- cultural and social responsibility of the architect:
  - problems as a result of the current financial crisis and, those yet to come
  - questions of competition, the north/south unbalance and the need for "fair trade"
- legal responsibility:
  - standards and the interpretation of standards
  - climatic change and the responsibility of the architect

## 1- In relation to the world financial crisis

Housing financed by mortgages has been recognized as the trigger of the economic recession and today these are seen to be the early signs that give us hope for an economic revival:

Housing, which has an intrinsic value for individuals, has paradoxically become an extremely speculative element in the world economy.

Indeed, it is undeniable that the financial crisis has had a very strong impact on the form of cities:

- firstly, on the “boom towns” that have developed without relating to the real need for housing, under the influence of a real estate bubble stimulated by financially attractive products such as subprimes and tax break incentives (e.g. Robien legislation in France);
- next, in cities whose economic fabric is very dependent on a single economic activity such as the car industry, tourism or finance, whose decline results in a downward spiral; and
- finally, the areas where the poorest populations are concentrated; cities in developing countries, underprivileged suburbs, weakened by the impoverishment of their residents and, the decline of public and private sector investment.

In this way, certain neighbourhoods have become ghost towns, particularly in the United States. In Las Vegas, 16 % of the rental flats are to let. In Detroit, where the population has been divided in half since 1950, a third of the city is today empty and deserted, an area the equivalent of San Francisco. 16 million dollars, 30 % of the federal aid obtained by the city will be allocated to the demolition of houses in ruin.

Ghost towns created by the crisis in the United States, in Europe or elsewhere, are a scandal in the eyes of an architect as might be the European follow land policy for a farmer and, especially so, as it has already occurred on several occasions (Just like the gold rush)!

Therefore, it is up to architects to relentlessly recall the fundamental role of housing and the city in the lifestyles of our fellow citizens and especially since it should occupy an important place in “planned growth” or “chosen decline” economies that certain humanist economists propose.

## **2- The need for fair trade**

As a cultural service, architecture today is a part of the vast movement of global trade, but also the north/south, south/south and north/north trade.

For the moment, the protocols for cooperation and trade between the countries of the north and those of the south become more and more related to the acquisition of competence and know how from client countries: such that the engineers and managers of important civil engineering construction sites are increasingly trained in consumer countries.

It is necessary to go further and insist that architects of the countries in the south are directly involved in the management but also especially the design of important developments related to their country, as the keepers of local culture.

Among others advantages, this would protect cultural variety to which the UIA is firmly attached.

The IUA might initiate a code of good behaviour in this matter that it proposes to the relevant international organizations (WTO, UNESCO,...).

Another task should also be an active struggle against precariousness housing in developed or developing countries. On one hand, we are thinking of the homeless but also residents taxed by uncertainty whose number in France, according to estimates, varies between 2 to 5 million households; (energy derelict).

## **3- Climatic change and the responsibility of the architect**

International organizations and the legislation of each country are going to establish more or less binding objectives for developers to resist against climatic change.

Architects can be considered as leaders in the construction industry, but also urban planning (transport, urban sprawl), in order to propose to developers projects which, while staying within a reasonable budget controlled go by their inventiveness, go widely beyond statutory objectives.

The architectural community should organize an exchange of good practice on this subject and the IUA could act as the instigator. The cultural variety of IUA members presents a guarantee of review of all the solutions. Over-fed people are not the most creative cooks and, at the same time, the empty stomach has no ears.

#### **4- Standards and the interpretation of standards: for an intelligence within the standard**

In its conclusions with respect to architecture, 13th December 2008, the European Economic Council invited member states and the European Commission, within the scope of their respective jurisdictions, “beyond technical standards, to develop an approach in terms of global objectives; economic, social, cultural and environmental”.

At the same time, the normative systems of all countries have been established on the initiative of industrial manufacturers and are governed by them. It becomes all the more important that architects position themselves as guarantors, "independent" from all pressure and from all lobbies, of the fair use of resources, whether material or human.