

Sustainable development

Questions linked purely to the energy consumption of buildings no longer interest me. They are now a routine part of technical design and are taken into consideration by industrial production and system manufacturers. Creating a building that consumes little in the way of energy has become banal; in fact, it would be more accurate to say that reduced energy consumption implies a banal building, as reflection has been replaced by an avalanche of standards and regulations that stifle any attempt at imaginative design.

In stark opposition to these "quality-labeled" buildings, designed to be decorated Thermos flasks, my thoughts on sustainable development instead focus on the invention of unique forms of architecture. Environmental issues have put considerations of geography, climate, topography, and so forth, back at the top of the agenda, providing an opportunity to finally break away from international architecture; we need to stop producing the same generic, mediocre buildings that we now see everywhere, as well as the "star" buildings that are designed as spectacular gestures but which all end up looking the same, as these too are now ubiquitous. There is a rich vein of creativity to be mined by considering context from new angles: availability of materials, local skills and know-how, building cultures, different uses and purposes. This begins in the city, by abandoning geometric urban planning in favor of a more fruitful approach that takes account of every characteristic of the site in question: relief, the risk of flooding, the current landscape, existing lines and features... in short, the polar opposite of the *tabula rasa*.

The most exciting questions surrounding sustainable development are those that put people back at the center of the project, as advocated by Alvar Aalto, not those that exclude people in favor of standards or technical performance alone. In this context, our relationship with technology in metropolises of several million inhabitants will, in my view, be of crucial importance in years to come. Technology has become omnipresent, burdensome and oppressive. And yet the know-how is there to make it so high-performing that it disappears. This doesn't mean reducing utilization or returning to the past, but instead calling for even more innovation so that technology serves a useful purpose while going unnoticed. Today, this relationship between people and technology is at a turning point and needs to be redefined, and it is for this reason that we take the sensory experience so seriously: our senses have been mistreated in order to benefit an ideological functionalism that was portrayed as the necessary consequence of a technical civilization.

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This is simply not true, and other approaches - which are once again compatible with the prospect of progress and dare to strive for a better future - are possible.

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