Make people come alive : A new architecture

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Today more than ever we find ourselves in a world out of balance. Our planet is hurting. Our institutions are reaching breaking point. Our stress levels are rising with escalating levels of obesity, depression and political polarisation across our society. However, within the cracks of the old systems there is a light. A light of a new era. A new way of living, being and working.

This manifesto envisions the rise of a new regenerative and rebellious architecture. This new architecture requires us to look inwards before we design outwards. It is an architecture rooted in the study and practice of human and organisational development. In short, we must seek to better understand the human and organisational processes that will give life to our buildings. Through this manifesto we propose to every individual and organisation working in the field of city development to consider the simple question of 'What makes people come alive?'

Is this not the true underlying purpose behind architecture?

Let's just take a moment to consider the rate and pace of urbanisation and modern day life. Every week 3 million people move into cities and this pace continue to increase exponentially. By 2050, there will be over 10 billion people on our planet and over 70% of us will be living in cities. Each year 1 million people take their own lives and 300M suffer from clinical depression. Every ten years global stress levels are expected to rise by 30%, which is proven by science to make us less compassionate, less creative and more addicted to personal possessions. We spend too much of our time in a high beta state, or in other words a constant flight or flight mode that limits our ability to relate, love and create with the people we care about most. One of the great design challenges we have in our times is to figure out how to build our future cities in a way that doesn't shut out our humanity.

The new architecture that I propose requires us to think and dream beyond the physical form and inquire about the human day-to-day experience of our urban lives. Rather than obsessing over materials and aesthetics, what would happen if architects and designers dedicated themselves to developing their self and systemic awareness? What if we invested more time to explore the architecture of community, organisations, emotions and human relationships? What if we regularly immersed ourselves in nature as a source of inspiration for our work? Something incredible happens when humans spend time in nature in a playful, mindful and conscious way. Nature has a profound influence on our health and wellbeing. We open up, we transform, we connect. We activate our natural human capacity to self-notice, to pick-up on somatic sensations that influence our being-and-knowing. For example, it is proven that spending time in a forest reduces pulse rate, blood pressure and cortisol levels. We become more considerate, generous and ultimately more connected to others and the world around us. Why is this?

Let's go one step deeper and explore the concept of the 'flow state'. That magical moment when time stops and we feel the unstoppable force of inspiration flow through us. What happens? Our left and right brains begin to relate and generate a frequency that also resonates with the frequency of our heart and body. Another way to conceptualise this is to imagine the space between the neutrons and protons that make up our cells. In this space there are fields of energy that are in constant motion and dialogue. We mostly use only our eyes and brain so much of the information that comes from our other senses remain hidden from our consciousness. We have mostly forgotten how to process and understand our the world of sensory exchanges that exists all around us. However, when we slow down and take the time to tune into our bodies and the nature around us we get a glimpse of this invisible world and begin to innately sense the interconnectedness of life. We feel into our bodies, we speak from the heart, we open up to love, we feel connected, we feel inspired. It's quantum physics. It's common sense. It's life. As Christopher Alexander writes it's that special quality that cannot be named. Perhaps, it's the stuff that **'makes us come alive'**?

So how do we actually design this 'aliveness' into our buildings and cities? Wellbeing research from across the world shows us that the quality of our social and professional relationships is at the core of what makes us feel happy, alive and safe. What would happen if we tried to step into the shoes of great facilitator or host and imagine how they create their desired atmosphere and vibe. What if the people living and working together in the same buildings would regularly retreat into nature together? What if we made an effort to design experiences not just spaces? How would we create a strong feeling of community and trust?

As an example, let's go back in time to the preparation of the COP 21 Climate Summit in Paris and compare it to the failures of Copenhagen years before. Many leaders who were at the heart of the negotiation credit the success of Paris to a single initiative where the leading negotiators and some heads of state came together for a few days prior to the conference with a single intention; 'no speeches, no presentations, just speak from the heart (off the record)'. This time spent together, filled with tears, emotions and human connection created an unstoppable momentum for the conference and agreement that followed. What can we learn from such events? Can we consider such facilitation as being part of a new architecture? If so what would be the implications?

These are the questions that I have been exploring since beginning my undergraduate degree at the Bartlett School of Architecture in 2007. From architecture to tech startups, business schools, nature immersions, eco-villages, leadership retreats, global gatherings, conferences, music festivals and even Burning Man (twice!), I've been on a long journey to explore new ways of working, being, living and co-creating. I was a reluctant architecture student at best, frustrated by the mindset of my school and in search for a philosophy of my own, which I am grateful to be putting into practice today in both life and career.

My philosophy can be expressed in a single sentence; **the understanding and practice of human and organisation development is fundamental to the evolution of architecture and the built environment.** In short, before we design our buildings we must first understand our own nature and then the nature of how we build thriving relationships, communities and organisations. Only then will we be able to create an architecture that is fit for the future, which is perhaps a testament to Churchill's quote 'First we shape our buildings. Then our buildings shape us.'

So with my parting words I will share with you my own pattern language of principles and projects that will hopefully shine a light towards a new and exciting path. Let's consider the follow themes;

- Walkable cities (future of mobility)

- Co-creation spaces (beyond coliving & coworking)

- Reconnecting with nature (time for slowing down)

- Cultures of caring (hiring conscious hosts)

- Local food production (the power of eating fresh)

- Digital enablers (matching & mapping)

The **first principle is to create a walkable city** that greatly reduces the time spent in peak time traffic or transit. This can only be achieved if cities are built at a human scale through a mixed-use development approach. What is also fundamental to this shift is the mainstreaming of self-driving electric vehicles, bicycle use, car pooling and taxi networks like uber. Once we liberate our high-streets from trucks and cars we can bring back those plazas, squares, lanes and intimate meeting places that somehow always end up being packed full of life and community.

The second principle is to design more co-creation spaces into our masterplans. How I define a co-creation space is a space that is designed to be transformed and changed over time, from day to night, weekday to weekend and season to season. These co-creation spaces can be both outdoors as well as indoors are intended to be natural meeting places for neighbours and coworkers. An essential element for establishing a successful coliving, coworking or members club is the art and science of curation and facilitation through which you build the brand and culture of a place one conversation and event at a time. This brings me to two of my larger real estate projects. The first is a residential development in Stockholm called Nobelberget and the second is an inner city redevelopment of a sweet factory called Sporta2 in Riga, Latvia. Potential partnerships are also emerging in Portugal and London. More to come on this soon.

The third principle is to **ensure that there are plenty of spaces for slowing down and reconnecting with nature**, such as intimate parks, gardens and third spaces such as cafes, pubs, libraries, museums and hotel lobbies filled with plants, natural light, cosy furniture and a welcoming community vibe. Perhaps the most effective and profound forms of community building that I have experience were enabled through facilitated nature retreats and immersions. Often we need to leave the day to day stresses and sounds of the city to allow ourselves time to truly reflect, let go and reconnect. Proximity to nature and community opens up a higher state of consciousness through which we can begin to speak and listen from our heart-body-mind. After countless leadership retreats, burner festivals and nature immersions I am consistently amazed by the universal power of nature to make strangers feel like lifelong friends.

The fourth principle is all about hospitality and the art of hosting. It continues to surprise me how quickly the right space and facilitation can establish a universal language and understanding within a group. We need to become more conscious as architects and designers around the little elements and moments that enable people to take of their mask and feel safe to be and express themselves. This was one of the guiding principles of Tech Farm a coliving house in Stockholm that I had the privilege to launch and live in for 18 months. At Tech Farm I found inspiration, friendship and love. I learned the importance of **creating a caring culture** within a building and community through small and conscious actions, careful recruitment, fun events and spontaneous conversations over dinner or breakfast. The secret to getting this right lies in hiring and recruiting the people who embody these behaviours and can lead by example.

The fifth principle is about the importance of local food production and making nutritious, sustainable and fresh food more affordable and accessible for all. Our current food system is the leading contributor to climate change and also generates ridiculous quantities of waste and illness. It's a toxic system that needs to be transformed. For this reason I started a company with my next door neighbour called Urban Oasis, where we grow greens and vegetables within the city.

The sixth principle refers to the importance of leveraging technology rather than resisting it. It's crucial to think about digital tools and platforms as **digital enablers** that can bring communities closer together rather than breaking them apart. It's importance to imagine the digital dimension of our future cities and to ensure that our buildings are as future proof as possible. We are developing a simple community platform and website for the Sporta2 redevelopment to explore how we can best leverage technology to create a thriving place to live, work and play.

Links:

TECH FARM
www.techfarm.life

SPORTA 2
www.sporta2.com

NOBELBERGET
www.stad.nobelberget.se

REGENERATORS - NATURE RETREATS
www.regenerators.co

URBAN OASIS
www.urbanoasis.life

EXPONENTIALS
www.exponentials.co.uk

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Exponential Future City Framework

Based on our research and experience we have developed an exponential future city framework based on the following 7 principles.

1. **Get the right capital.** Raise money to back a future income stream instead of the sales of buildings. Switch from build to sell to build to rent model for first phase of development as a long term strategy to exponentially increase value of land and future development.

2. **Maximise density, flexibility and mix of units.** Design space efficient apartments. Break the building down into smaller tribal houses and floors. Design for intimate hangout and kitchen / dinning spaces throughout the development. Encourage a mixed-use masterplan with a diverse mix of nearby living, working and retail units.

3. **Reduce planning risk.** Stick with local aesthetics and heritage. Stay within standard housing classifications and position the development as pioneering in terms of sustainability, wellbeing, diversity, affordability and community engagement.

4. **Take long term ownership of ground floor spaces and outdoor semi-public spaces.** Use basement and ground floors as semi-public multi-use co-creation spaces (e.g. coworking cafe, community kindergarden, members kitchen, members event venue, etc). Bring the street to lift through great landscape design and an art fund for local artists to host experiences and create work for seasonal exhibitions.

5. **Negotiate down the need for car parking.** Use basement floors for electric car-sharing and indoor farming. Suggest the development of walkable neighbourhoods with reduced car owners and super grid infrastructure (ref. Barcelona).

6. **Front load the marketing and sales budget.** Invest in culture and place branding. Publish culture manifesto that defines the vision and value for the project. Launch communications platform and events programme to give future residents and tenants a taste of what is to come.

7. **Build great teams to operate the common spaces and facilities.** Do not outsource community building or operations. Recruit a strong leader and founding team who are in full alignment with your vision and values. Allow time for recruitment and onboarding to ensure the right mix of tenants and residents. Provide a framework but allow each team to bring their own unique style and direction.

We aim to apply these principles in all our client project.