

Living the Urban Modernity Towards the Future

Modern Movement represents an innovative approach to community life, public space and urban territory organization. The search for the functional city follows the Housing Reform and Garden Cities movement. Modern architecture and expression, standardization, hygiene, urbanism, school education, governments and the modern architecture debate were the issues identified by the first CIAM in the early 20's. As it was stated then, "town planning is the organization of the functions of collective life; it extends over both the urban agglomerations and the countryside...the redistribution of land, the indispensable preliminary basis for any town planning, must include the fair division between the owners and the community of the unearned increment resulting from works of joint interest." Towards a better life, was the goal of the discussion on housing and leisure, work and circulation. In fact, CIAM's influential concept of "functional city" stands in a kind of "floating somewhere between socialism and social welfare, always with an upward line point towards the future" to quote Aldo Van Eyck. After World War II, the CIAM efforts concentrated in finding a new basis for a socially engaged architecture idea.

As we all know, happiness as a myth or a contemporary invention is one of the human being goals which modernity converted in an exigency. Sometimes it appears as a collective conquest, other times as a return to some kind of private happiness. Following Giedion's "eternal present" concept, one must deal with the task of making a better society based on a "New Tradition", searching for the roots of our time, the contemporary time. But how can we find roots in this time in which a permanent movement is promoting the rapid growth and transformations of urban areas into metropolis and conurbations? This time, in which "modernity has been detached from the past and must jump ahead in a vertigo rhythm that doesn't allow it to establish roots and pushes it into survival just from one day to the other; modernity can return to its origins and to its renovation abilities". Following Octavio Paz reflection we must fight for the modern tradition possibility as the consequence of our historical time acceleration. The theme of the "core" of the city was indeed a demand to look over this real tradition with fresh eyes and modern values without losing the roots. A new idea has been stated, linking past to future and assuring the recognition of the modern pioneer generation effort to establish the fundamental union between all the architect responsibilities: social, technical and artistic commitment.

Social approach became so important that Bruno Zevi defended that the mission of modern architecture was to fight formalism and to serve the daily needs of the common man. Working for the creation of a physical environment to both satisfies "man's emotional and material needs and stimulate his spiritual growth" (CIAM 8, Hoddesdon, England, 1951: The Heart of the City) became a priority in order to answer Le Corbusier's "Charter of Habitat" proposition.

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In fact this social and collective purpose is deeply related with the process of “Living in the Urban Modernity”, the subject of our conference which deals with a wide range of themes. From space organization and planning to urban design; from monumentality and representation to metropolis and city core concepts; these are questions to debate now, in Mexico, at the UNAM’s unique space and atmosphere. Sessions on Modern Living and everyday architecture, on Social Infrastructure and Planning, on The Modern City and its (monumental) representation, on Modern Habitat Technology and finally on the University City as a new urban planning paradigm related to the possibility of a New Monumentality are challenges for a fruitful debate that will be inspired by the UNAM, the 20th century World Heritage Site which hosts our Conference.

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