edra 32 2001

Edinburgh 2001: 32nd Annual Conference of the Environmental Design Research Association

Old World ~ New Ideas

3-6 JULY 2001

environmental and cultural change and tradition in a shrinking world

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introduction

OLD WORLD - NEW IDEAS: ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE AND TRADITION IN A SHRINKING WORLD.

Martin Edge
Scottish Centre for Environmental Design Research
(Search) ***Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland***

This volume is the proceedings of the 32nd annual conference of **edra**, the *Environmental Design Research Association*. The most obvious innovation at this year's conference is that, for the first time, the event is being held outside north America. Specifically, it is coming to Scotland.

In Britain we often use the phrase 'divided by a common language' to describe our relationship with the English speaking Americas. It's easy to be flippant about linguistic differences, but there can be serious implications to transatlantic differences in meaning. If one person is talking French and another German, it's generally pretty clear that there are differences in meaning and that a translation is needed. If, on the other hand, English speakers from opposite sides of the Atlantic are discussing issues of 'culture' for example, it's easy to assume that they are talking about the same thing.

In some ways our languages are very different. It might, for example, be said of past **edra** conference that their…

"... colorful program centers on regular environment-behavior studies, giving delegates something to think about right through fall. Their organization has gotten to be a tradition stretching back to the dawn of history, when many of us were in diapers. It is a forum for defense of environment-behavior research, and has dove much deeper than thinking in real-estate professions. Doing the math, the huge number of papers spans the global, federal, state, city, neighborhood, block, sidewalk and yard. Edra research has molded to contemporaneous society, contextualizing issues like aging populations, changing labor patterns, freeway versus railroad in transportation, housing, in the condo, duplex, brownstone or apartment and a bunch of gray areas between."

At **edra32 2001** in Edinburgh, things will be completely different. The conference language this time is English. So this year its…

"... colourful programme centres on normal environment-behaviour studies, giving delegates something to think about until the autumn. Its organisation has been going on for a number of years, beginning when many of us were in nappies. It is a forum for defence of environment-behaviour research, and has dived much deeper than thinking in property professions. Doing the sums, the not inconsiderable number of papers spans the global, national, county, town, community, street, pavement and garden. Edra research has moulded to contemporary society, putting into context issues like ageing populations, changing labour patterns, road versus train in public transport, housing, in the mansion, semi, tenement or flat and a lot of grey areas between."

…That's 111 (albeit somewhat illiterate) words of English, in two different versions, each meaning almost exactly the same thing but with thirty-eight linguistic differences. The gap between the passages represents the 4000 miles (that's 6400km by the way) of the Atlantic Ocean.

Differences of meaning and perspective are at the heart of **edra32** in Edinburgh and their exploration has set the agenda for its Keynote and Plenary sessions. The very subject of the conference is designed to conjure up images of difference, between 'old world' and 'new world', between old and new ideas, between 'change' and 'tradition'. The individual's construction of the meaning of these concepts is, of course, very much conditioned by culture.

I wonder how many people automatically make an association between 'old world' and old ideas, between 'new world' and new ideas? One of our aims at this conference is to show that this association is not necessarily justified. Similarly, is it appropriate to see 'change' as being placed in opposition to 'tradition'?

The conference highlights both changing traditions and, perhaps, traditions of change.

Setting Contexts

Nowhere are both tradition and change - the old and the new - more apparent than in our Keynote presentation. After a gap of nearly three centuries, a referendum on devolution in 1998 has brought back a Parliament to Scotland. *Mick Duncan* and *John Kinsley* of EMBT/RMJM Architects are responsible for the new Scottish Parliament project and describe the generation of what is probably Scotland's most prestigious and culturally significant building for at least a century. *Chris Harvie*, with the unique perspective of a Scottish historian working within a federal system (in a German university) shows how Scots, having exported a system of governance around the world, are constructing their own version of democratic process based on the demands of the modern world and hundreds of years of cultural history.

Can the physical design of a parliament reflect, or even mould, the way in which a Nation's government and democratic process takes place?

Transatlantic differences and similarities of meaning are evident in the Plenary session by *David Uzzell, Jan Teklenburg* and *Gabrielle Moser* on Transatlantic Perspectives on Cultural Awareness. For the first time in edra's history an event at the conference is sponsored by iaps (the International Association for People-environment Studies) and it is to be hoped that this represents a move by both organisations from being merely international to being truly global. The fact that the iaps AGM and meetings of EPUK *('Looking for Environmental Psychology in the UK')* are taking place under the aegis of **edra32** is further testament to the close relationship between the two organisations.

In another plenary on Cultural Identity and the Natural Environment : From Parliament to Park, *Seaton Baxter*, an ex-member of the Board of Scottish Natural Heritage and former Chairman of the environmental NGO - Scottish Wildlife and Countryside LINK (Now Scottish Environment LINK) mirrors the cultural awareness theme of the Keynote in the context of the natural environment. The Scots have made major contributions to the evolution of environmental sentience and its public recognition. Yet only recently has it been decided that Scotland should have its own unique form of national park system. The idea of national parks in an international context contains multiple meanings and to this the Scottish system has added a new dimension by linking national parks with 'Sustainable Development', rather than with 'wilderness'. How will this reflect an old or new identity for Scots?

A conference cannot claim to be genuinely global however if it consists largely of parochial discussion between two sub-sets of the same English speaking, essentially European-derived culture. *Ashraf Salama, Necdet Teymur, Magda Sibley and Sandra Horne* present a **Plenary** on **People in Design Education: Emerging Paradigms and Cross-Cultural Visions**, which aims to challenge the dominance of developed world cultures. It is widely recognised that environment-behaviour research has made no real advances in becoming accepted into the mainstream of the architectural studio in the last 25 years. It is suggested that the reasons for this reside in the tradition of architectural education as it has evolved over the centuries in Europe.

Attendance at **edra** and **iaps** conferences is dominated by people from developed, mostly western countries. When people from the developing world do attend, is it with the implicit assumption that they have come to learn, in one way or another, from the more 'advanced First World'? In the case of environment-behaviour studies in design education however, the irony is that it is the paradigm adopted, and aggressively exported, by the west, which creates the problem in the first place. The Plenary suggests that in this area the developing world may have something to teach the developed world. In parts of the world where the meaning of 'architecture' is less bound up in historical formulations of the ideas of 'high art' and where there is a pragmatic need to deliver liveable, affordable built environments, are there different paradigms in operation which can inform the improvement of the situation in western architectural education?

Research at edra32 2001

The core of the conference is of course the participation of all its delegates in research dissemination and lively debate. Including individual contributions to symposia and the like, over 500 high quality submissions were received and are included in this volume, either as full papers, as constituents of symposia, workshops, working groups or intensives, or as individual paper abstracts and design projects.

Twenty full papers are published here, rather more than in previous years. The papers have been chosen entirely on merit, as perceived by our international panel of reviewers. No other editorial decisions have been

taken, such as selecting papers according to their ability to illuminate the conference theme. Given this fact, it is remarkable to what degree the papers do reflect both the academic theme and the global aspirations of the conference.

The papers span topics from using lessons from the past in urban design, to housing and the residential environment, to participation and education, to people and ecology.

In the field of **Urban Design** *Kapila Silva* discusses historic preservation as a mechanism for dealing with the stress caused by cultural change. He points to cities in **developing countries** as both the best settings for the application and evaluation of cross-cultural approaches and the places where the problems and stresses are greatest.
Semra Aydinli takes us to **Turkey** and develops ideas of continuity and change of image in the specific urban environment of Istanbul. He explores new ideas in an old city through a 'reading' of its architecture as a narrative. We stay in **Turkey** with *Ayse Kubat's* exploration of culture and pedestrian movement through the study of Istanbul's space syntax.

Jacob Kimaryo discusses the influence of urban design on space use in a study of Dar es Salaam city centre in **Tanzania**. If the Turkish studies show the impact of culture and movement in generating urban form, this study shows us that inappropriate, imposed urban design can create space use and movement problems.

Jon Norman continues the cultural history theme at a finer level of detail than the city, with a study of institutional and architectural change in synagogues in twentieth century **USA**. He shows that, despite the use of some traditional symbolism, their strongest determinant was the aesthetic concerns of contemporary American culture in general.

Jos Smeets and *Jan Teklenburg* move the discussion of cultural history into another strong theme of the conference, the **home environment**, with a study of **European** residential culture which spans both a whole continent and 1000 years. They show the complexity of the way local and regional styles develop and the dangers of slavishly applying sometimes arbitrarily generated local types just because they are mandated by history
Martin Edge and *Peter Duncan* demonstrate some of these dangers in a microcosm of this home environment, 'self-build' housing in the **UK**. They point out the inappropriateness of a historically based aesthetic in producing good vernacular design for the future and suggest some mechanisms for making self-build a more viable housing option.

Maria Lay takes us to **Brazil** and to the public housing scheme, with a study of the way in which dwelling type diversity affects the perception and use of outdoor spaces. Once again the conclusion is that imposed design solutions can be divisive and counter-productive.

Still dealing with **Brazilian** public housing, *Antonio Reis* explores the effect of housing appearance on resident attitude and behaviour in a study linked to Lay's. He concludes that appearance and personalisation has a significant effect on housing quality. This paper develops themes introduced by Reis in a paper published in **edra31/2000**.

In a city in the mid-west of the **USA** *James Potter* has carried out another case study of resident satisfaction with housing, this time in buildings renovated for housing. He concludes that perceived safety and similarity with neighbours contribute significantly to resident satisfaction.

Another significant theme of the conference is the development of methods in environment-behaviour research and *Khier Al-Kodmany*, also in the **USA**, brings us a study of **community participation** using web-based mapping methods. Again the conclusions relate to people's perception of their own community, this time a part of Chicago. Like Reis' paper, this study develops work previously reported at **edra** in San Francisco.

Back in **Brazil**, *Vicente Del Rio* and *Henry Sanoff* also write about participation in their paper on a participatory process involving teachers, parents, students and staff of a school in Rio de Janeiro. They introduce another strong theme of this volume - education and the design process - in pointing out the contribution to the creative design process of such programmes.

School buildings are also the subject of *Celen Pasalar's* paper on the meaning and perception of buildings of different architectural styles. Pasalar finds a preference for unique, ambiguous and interesting forms amongst future educators in North Carolina in the **USA**, over forms of school building which are most familiar to them.

Karen Keddy has carried out a study of difference amongst middle-class design studio students in a mid-

west State in the **USA** and finds students with restricted means to have a significantly different educational experience to better-off students. Retrogressive steps caused by financial constraints on the **UK** higher education system makes Keddy's lesson a salutary one and *Jo Milner* and *Martin Edge* stay in the design studio for their study, based on a discourse analysis of the meaning of 'function', of the attitudes of architecture students to disability issues.

Back in the **USA** *Ekaterini Vlahos* develops this theoretical theme in a very practical context with a study in Denver of the application of 'Service Learning' as a process of understanding and articulating the specific needs of a community.

The final major theme of the papers, **People and Ecology**, deals with the relationship between people and ecological pressure and change, beginning with *Jeffrey Hou's* study of environmental consciousness and environmental activism in **Taiwan**. Hou outlines the development of a more sophisticated intellectual construct of environmental issues with a specifically Taiwanese cultural identity.

In the **UK** *Patrick Devine-Wright* deals with the complex issue of public resistance to a sustainable and ostensibly environmentally positive initiative, the development of wind farms. He points to the need for a more systematic approach to community involvement.

Fatima Bernardo and *Isabel Ramos* deal with environmental education programmes in the Alcacovas River Basin in **Portugal**, pointing to the replacement of utilitarian, agricultural relationships to the river system by more recreationally based behaviour.

Finally, back in the city in the **USA**, *Brian Deal* presents an integrated ecological and engineering approach to analysing urban ecosystems. He develops the theoretical basis for ideas of sustainability and a spatial modelling technique for ecological systems in the urban environment.

It would be parochial to suggest that the geographical spread of these papers is of particular significance for the relevance of their conclusions or their validity. Yet it is worth noting that quality is not something restricted to particular places and that an impartial, blind refereeing process has selected research from the opposite ends of four continents.

The Conference Themes

Most people resist the idea of being categorised. It is a particular irony that the very researchers who spend much of their lives categorising others tend to dislike their own research being categorised. There is a perfectly good reason for this of course. All research worth its salt is telling us something new and research which fits neatly into already established categories could be said to be somewhat devalued by its very ability to be pigeon-holed.

Very often discusion at conference sessions allocated to particular topics hinges around a lack of 'holism' and the need to focus on every other imaginable aspect of the problem in addition to the one targeted by the particular piece of research. Holistic thinking may be a laudable aim, but few people have succeeded in talking about everything all at the same time and making any sense. Making sense of the meaning of the papers presented at **edra32 2001** requires some attempt at categorisation and all the papers have been subdivided into 7 parallel 'Themes'.

The themes all have a connection to the overall Subject of the conference, but have been shaped by strong linkages amongst the papers received. It is the work of the delegates that sets the direction for the conference. That is, the Themes are not pre-determined but represent one attempt to categorise the submissions received. The **Themes** are…

Old World/New World: New Ideas/Old Ideas explores history, culture and the development of the cityscape and rural environment. Variations deal with different geographical scales from urban form to the individual street and from the modern perspective to the historical long view.

Old and New: Age and Health in the Built Environment deals with both issues of disability and growing up and growing old in the city. Variations include design for dementia and other disabilities, designing healthier built environments and designing environments for children and youth in the city.

Change and Tradition in Housing presents multicultural approaches to the design of both the home and the wider residential environment. It considers issues of meaning in the home for people as diverse as the middle class suburbanite and the refugee from natural disaster. Variations deal with the home both as cultural space and physical system.

People and Ideas in the Assessment of Public Built Environments moves us into the public and corporate domain and issues related to the design of workspaces and public buildings. Assessment is a strong part of this theme, with Variations on community participation and POE, as well as cultural aspects of public space.

New Ideas in Built Environment Research explores some more theoretical ideas in environment-behaviour research. From qualitative cultural issues related to the meaning and identity of place, to quantitative methods for the evaluation of design and the built environment.

New Ideas in Architectural Theory and Education turns to the other side of the coin in dealing with issues in the design studio, ethics in architecture, aesthetics and the representation of space and specific design issues. Variations challenge the very meaning of 'environment-behaviour research' by taking us into the entirely virtual environment.

Environment in a Shrinking World deals with interactions between humanity and natural and quasi-natural environments, from extreme wilderness to urban green spaces. As well as our interaction with specific environments, Variations tackle issues of ecological behaviour and the preservation and re-use of built environments.

Finally...

If you have been able to get to **edra32** in Edinburgh this year I hope you enjoy both the conference and the place. The exciting changes which are currently taking place in Scotland are mirrored all over Europe. Old political orders have broken down, old social and cultural orders are being challenged. The time and the place are right for a conference dealing with '*environmental and cultural change and tradition in a shrinking world'*.

Our understanding of the world is largely mediated by language and with 'globalisation' apparently 'shrinking' our world, linguistic difference in meaning is an appropriate metaphor for cultural difference. Often we may think we know what each other means but it needs global forums like **edra** to shift the geographical focus, bringing people together under one roof to build a mutual understanding. Both culture and the English language may differ on opposite sides of the Atlantic, but just be thankful that these proceedings aren't in Scots or Gaelic.