

Landskonferanse for stedsutvikling 2009, Florø

Methods to develop the village considering the landscape, climate and vegetation : an ecourbanism approach

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Abstract

Ecouurbanism is about whole system, simultaneous thinking at **macro, meso and micro scales**. Whether at sub-regional, city, neighbourhood, or village scale, the general principles apply.

Our current way of living is encouraged in part by the way we plan and develop existing communities. Today, more than ever before, we take many things for granted in planning and living 'modern' life that have an impact far beyond own local horizons. This is why we need to be more considerate in our **holistic approach** to design and planning, and there needs to be a greater awareness of forces and issues outside of our own sphere that we, nevertheless, contribute to. We need to **effect behavioural and as well as material change**. What is 'value' in the true sense, and what should our values encompass? It is my contention that immediate financial return is too narrow a way to consider these things, as true value is seen over time and via a series of criteria. This way of *seeing* is more immediately understandable to a municipality or social housing group who can take the long term view, than to most developers who need to satisfy their own or shareholders expectations of return on capital, and whose own involvement in a community may be quite short term. Here is a problem that needs to be considered at legal and fiscal levels to find an appropriate solution.

In recent decades, there has been a change in approach to reflect the value of **cultural heritage**, now we need to consider the full value of **natural heritage** and **natural capital**.

The ecourbanism approach to development, or retrofitting, considers the whole. **Interdependence and interconnectivity of systems** lie at the heart, and landscape, climate and vegetation are part of this. My own core discipline, Landscape Architecture, more than most, must be much more than mere decoration of spaces created by others. In Britain this work is frequently referred to as '*Landscaping*', a term I greatly dislike, since it is akin to 'decorating' - a skin deep approach at the whim of fashion. A far better term is that we are planning, designing, implementing and managing **Multi-functional Environmental Infrastructure** that delivers a series of **Environmental Benefits** to the village, town or city. Since settlements cannot exist in isolation, we must consider the hinterland of the settlement in both a *physical* and an *actual* sense. The global economy and **global reach of our everyday convenience** and current habits means that the **actual hinterland** involves countries and continents processes, people and effects far beyond our own sphere. This must inform how we plan and take decision for the future. This is difficult to manage when we also face an uncertain future, with **the need for flexibility**, with regards to the effects of global climate change that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) presented in overwhelming evidence as being forced by mankind in its' forth assessment published in 2007.

Multiply the small actions of many, and together they become a large action that may be achieved through behavioural change. My students at the Bergen Arkitekt Skole and at the Estonian Academy of Arts were both set a small task within the ecourbanism programme - to look at **the cost of our everyday convenience**. The reason behind this task was to raise awareness of the **global reach, embodied carbon, and embodied water** in goods and services we accept as a normal part of life. We need to do this because if we continue to plan

and design development guided by **conventional wisdom** we may miss obvious opportunities to effect necessary change.

Florø is an example of how a community becomes predominantly reliant on a single resource - herring - that can be affected by both global forces, and by the actions of man. It is a microcosm of our global situation in many ways, suggesting that resilient regeneration must address concerns at macro, meso and micro scales. In another task, the BAS Students have looked at interpreting these concerns in a series of 1:1 sketches presented as Art Installations completed in Florø last week in an exploration of these issues in a more abstract mannerⁱ. Sustainability is perhaps an overused term, but the concept of **durability, resilience, and inter-generational equity** remain. **Sustainable Development** is, perhaps a contradiction in our current state, for what makes development sustainable? The veteran British Scientist Professor James Lovelockⁱⁱ has suggested that we should in fact be striving for **Sustainable Retreat**. The question is how do we effect sustainable retreat at macro, meso and micro levels? Does it mean we develop in some areas to bring about retreat elsewhere? Certainly it must mean doing more with less, greater efficiency of thinking and of means, this is central to ecourbanism.

ⁱ Lead teacher May Elin, an artist native to Florø. The part of the course known as DAV, or *the other world*, as BAS is run in every year as a way to make the students minds more flexible at problem solving through abstract art.

ⁱⁱ James Lovelock is author of the Gaia Theory, that the Earth acts like a self-sustaining organism - a concept now widely accepted by the scientific community.