

INVERNESS, SCOTLAND – New Urbanist Andres Duany of Miami-based Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company (DPZ) delivered the first of three lectures in the United Kingdom as part of DPZ's engagement for the Castle Stuart project located on the A96 corridor between Inverness and Nairn. The lecture series, scheduled from June 28 to July 4, 2006, is sponsored by The Moray Estates, owner and developer of Castle Stuart, in association with the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI), the University of Edinburgh (UoE) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

Tonight's presentation, entitled "Making Towns Again: New Urbanism and the Highlands", was made before an audience of over 200 attendees, comprising local officials, council members, developers, planners, local businessmen, professors, students and other members of the Inverness-Nairn community. Advance response to the lecture was unprecedented in the history of the UHI, and the venue had to be moved at the last minute from the smaller UHI Executive Office to a larger, temporary riverside marquee erected on University grounds.

Mr. Duany discussed the New Urbanism within the context of the American experience and how it related to Inverness. He established early in the lecture that while he and his team had only spent a couple of days in Scotland, they soon identified in the Highlands the same mistakes the United States had been committing in the last thirty to fifty years with the proliferation of the suburban patterns of development. While acknowledging that Inverness was poised for tremendous growth in the next few decades, Duany cautioned against growth "with blinders on". "It is a false Garden of Eden", Duany said. "You don't know what it is like to commit to suburban sprawl."

Using a split screen, Duany presented images of American suburban sprawl counterpointed by images of traditional neighborhoods, including those of projects by DPZ. Duany stated that rather than attempt to paint a Scottish portrait of development, he deliberately chose to show images of American cities and places, and in so doing, transform the presentation into "a horror show of the path [Inverness is] on". The images elicited strong emotional responses from many members of the audience, who indeed recognized many of the suburban images already emergent within their own city.

Relating a recent visit to a local suburban development, Duany said, "The suburbs you are creating are double edged. They are arguably the best residential homes you can get, *as long as you stay indoors*. The private realm is the best you can buy, but the minute you leave your house, you realize that [the neighborhood] is also terribly bad."

Addressing the proposed design of the new town at Castle Stuart, Duany said the Estates and DPZ were deliberating issues on a much more fundamental, urban level, such as whether the town should be purely Scottish or whether it should be more cosmopolitan in its urbanism. "It is a much more interesting conversation than 'this [architectural] style versus that style'".

After having visited smaller traditional towns such as Dunkeld and Cromarty, Duany stated that his team intends to use the increment of the village in planning for the new town. The village, he explained, presented a complete range of opportunities and experiences for each stage of one's life, from cradle to grave -- "the ebb and flow of traditional village life". "Fortunately," Duany encouraged, "you have not lost this tradition yet."

Response at the reception following the lecture was positive. Many attendees were in animated discussions about the future of their community and eager to learn more about the New Urbanism and the proposed approach to the Castle Stuart development from Duany and his team. "I'm a new convert!" proclaimed Secretary to UHI James Fraser, who was glad to see a new approach to planning for growth in the Highlands. The evening closed with a presentation to Duany of a plaid tie in his clan's tartans, together with a book on the history of the UHI.

The second lecture of the series, entitled "Making Towns Again: New Urbanism and Scotland" and included in the RIAS Annual Lecture series, will be on Thursday, June 29, in Lecture Room 1 at the UoE School of Architecture, 20 Chambers Street, Edinburgh. The lecture is anticipated to feature a more academic oriented discourse on planning traditions in Scotland, including a discussion of the works of Sir Patrick Abercrombie and Sir Patrick Geddes.