

LONDON, ENGLAND – Andres Duany spoke to some 150 architects, planners and officials at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) headquarters of the global tipping point in urbanism and a proposed system for the scientific calibration of the built environment. Duany's lecture, "Making Towns Again: New Urbanism and the UK", was crafted to bring to full circle the two previous lectures he had delivered in Scotland the previous week.

As at his most recent lecture in Edinburgh, Duany lamented the preponderance in Europe for stylistic debate, as opposed to discussing and determining more fundamental issues such as urban structure, neighborhood design and regional impact. Duany admitted that a large part of the problem originates from the United States.

"[In Europe], for the first time the middle class is able to affect the look of a city or region. In America, what [the middle class] do is choose kitsch... The American middle class are the cause of environmental problems in the world today. Period. As we export the American lifestyle to places like China or India, the results are catastrophic."

Duany lamented that the other side of the issue concerns the fact that there are too few urbanists to fight the good fight. "It's a terrible problem how few New Urbanists are trained; there are not enough of us", he said, citing how the tipping point was made clear to him with the great call to arms to replan and rebuild the hurricane-devastated communities in Mississippi and Louisiana. As such, Duany said, the New Urbanists have been "dragged back to education", training its ranks not just on the issues of design, but also on the social, regulatory and policy aspects of planning. "What [the New Urbanism] is best at is the strategy and tactics of politics," Duany stated. This he noted was fundamental to surmounting the polemics of architectural style.

"If we don't [become technocratic], the cities become designed by the engineers and the environmentalists... Although [the New Urbanists] were convincing people one after the other [with regards to our philosophy towards planning and design], the [political] resistance was [the engineers and environmentalists] had a system and we didn't."

Referring to recent press about his firm's appointment to design a new town in Tornagrain, Duany said, "They were worried about this American coming in to build a new town in Scotland and not understanding [local conditions]. And yet, what do they build? They're building San Diego."

He went on to quote Christopher Alexander, saying "We do not need to design the appliance. We need to design the plugs that connect the appliance to the existing power grid."

Recognizing then that one of the most influential movements is in fact the environmental front, and that even this movement falls short when it comes to assessing the built environment, Duany proposed a theory for planning and urban design that builds upon the environmental principles of habitat and classification – The Transect. In the Transect, the varying degrees of density and the parameters for their corresponding built forms - road widths, building form and function, setbacks, landscaping etc.- are appropriately designed and detailed according to each element's classification within a continuum from a rural to urban context. "This new theory is a way of looking at cities that is environmental, but it's not about greening, or bringing in bushes. It's much more fundamental than that. We need the power of the environmentalists to back us and we need to get them out of the way to allow us to build the cities that people will like to live in."

Duany observed that in Britain, "[they] don't have codes, it's not very strict; everything is negotiated... There's a lot of arbitrariness when it comes to building. That's okay because most of it took, but it's getting out of control." In presenting a number of Transects from a diverse range of other times and places – from Geddes to McHarg, from Taipei to Pienza – Duany argued that the Transect, and its supporting concepts of the Quadrat and the Disect, are easily calibrated for various places in the United Kingdom, as a taxonomic engine for bringing "the necessary [urban] genetic material to the city" across the rural to urban settings.

"The problem of modernist architecture is not its abstraction; [the problem is] it has not developed an urban or rural mode – it cuts across the Transect."

Duany closed his lecture by noting that the Transect also seeks to denote a continuum in time as it does a continuum of place. The Transect inherently possess the ability for successional evolution across Transect zones. "The Transect," Duany said, "is not only a geographic drawing; it can transform over time."

"If there is a lesson to be learned in London, it is the successional transformation of its buildings."

This lecture was the last of Duany's lecture series in the United Kingdom, as part of DPZ's engagement for the Tornagrain project located on the A96 corridor between Inverness and Nairn. The series ran from June 28 to July 4, 2006, and was sponsored by The Moray Estates, owner and developer of Tornagrain, in association with the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI), the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) and the Royal Institute of British Architects.