

EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND – Andres Duany this evening challenged some 100 Scottish planners, architects, officials and community members gathered in Lecture Room 1 at the University of Edinburgh School of Architecture and seeking a Scottish paradigm for planning and urban design, to think beyond stylistic debates and instead adopt an approach based on the availability and acceptability of multiple settings, opportunities and options. Duany opened his lecture, entitled “Making Towns Again: New Urbanism and Scotland”, by admitting to receiving enormous pressure since arriving in Scotland to speak about the issue of architectural style as opposed to urbanism.

“European architects are incredibly ideological about style; Americans are more pragmatic. Does it really matter that a building is modernist or traditionalist? Does it actually harm you?” Duany asked. “We should get past that idea; the syntax of buildings is what should make sense.”

A fundamental problem, Mr. Duany stated, is that the planning and design professions in recent years have been increasingly subservient to the arguments of the technocratic professions, including transportation engineers and environmentalists. Speaking specifically about the latter, Duany said that while environmentalism in Europe still involves the inclusion of humans in the landscape, in America, environmentalists care only about nature and where humans don't build, to the exclusion of places where humans in fact settle and the detriment thereof.

“It is the environmentalists that prevent us from designing a truly urban street like in Edinburgh. With a building. And a sidewalk. And a street... without a rivulet running down each side.” Duany argued that blanket ordinances, such as those imposed for environmental or traffic concerns, are the bane of sensible planning, because such ordinances disregard, and are incongruent with, the variety inherent in the human environment. Duany admonished such an approach as shortsighted and stunted. “There is an American saying – ‘If you only have a hammer [for a tool], then you treat everything like a nail.’ If [nature is your only tool], you only see green and try to green everything.”

In addition, Duany posited that the technocratic language developed by professions such as the environmentalists and the transportation engineers have bought them the scientific credibility that has in turn discredited the “warm-and-fuzzies” of planning and urban design. What is then needed, he proposed, is a similarly scientific system and lexicon for planning and urban design that establishes the same technocratic credibility and elevates the discourse to at least the same level as that of the environmentalists and engineers. “You want to level the playing field,” Duany said, “so that New Urbanism is not more difficult to do than conventional development.”

To this aim, Duany presented the concept of the Transect as the fundamental tool for urbanism. Duany explained that the Transect has its origins in the study of natural systems and environments, but went on to say that the same methodology for classifying habitat was equally applicable to the human patterns of settlement. Drawing upon historic examples, including early work on the theory by Scottish planner Sir Patrick Geddes and by Scottish landscape architect Ian McHarg, Duany proposed the Transect as the most effective system for making intelligent decisions regarding what goes where in the human environment. 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.

Duany said, “In my years as a planner, I've learned that you cannot deny people things. Instead, you *allocate* things...you become an allocator.” Duany maintained that this method of allocation and assignment allows for multiple design, regulatory, administrative, and consequently lifestyle, choices across this continuum.

Using the host city as an example, Duany said “I stared out my hotel window. And I looked down, and saw true urbanism, second to none. Edinburgh [is] a real urban place: no nature, you terrace things, all stone buildings, etc. But I looked to the distance, and I also saw nature, not too far beyond, also unmitigated.”

Referring to his recent visits in the Highlands to places such as Dunkeld, Inverness and Cromarty, Duany said that Scottish cities and towns were well-suited for Transect calibration, given their inherent diversity within such relatively small areas of settlement. Duany nonetheless presented the possibility for Scottish places to look beyond local paradigmatic conditions to create a fully calibrated Transect. “To what extent do you remain immensely Scottish and to what extent do you start opening up [to the world]?” Duany asked.

In that event, Duany said that “bringing in [building] typologies rather than styles or fashions is really what you need...In your pursuit to build your Scotland, pursue the right to create both the urban and the rural.”

Duany's lecture series in the United Kingdom is part of DPZ's engagement for the Castle Stuart project located on the A96 corridor between Inverness and Nairn. The series runs from June 28 to July 4, 2006, and is sponsored by The Moray Estates, owner and developer of Castle Stuart, in association with the University of Highlands and Islands, the University of Edinburgh and the Royal Institute of British Architects. The third lecture of the series, entitled “Making Towns Again: New Urbanism and the UK”, will be at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, July 4, at the Jarvis Suite, RIBA, 66 Portland Place, London.