

Architecture essay

Sociology, Population



Comparing Two Lectures

The two lectures that I have chosen to compare are Patrick Fensham's lecture on Who Designs the Cities? and Ingo Kumic's lecture on Urban Design and Making the City. Both lectures address the expansion of cities and the design processes which take place behind these improvements. Kumic addresses the question of 'production vs. promotion' and 'form vs. function' which addresses two cities – New York and Dubai, with regard to these questions. Fensham, however, focuses his lecture entirely on Sydney in Australia with a focus, seemingly, entirely on the production and functionality of the city's expansion.

In Patrick Fensham's lecture, he addresses the planned expansion of Sydney, Australia for the year 2036. The plans addresses improvements such as housing, public transport, the protection of Sydney's environment, growing Sydney's economy and, amongst other things, the plans recognise a need for creating a balanced use of the fringe areas of Sydney, presumably working in conjunction with the earlier point that Sydney's natural environment needs to be maintained too. However, the most valuable phrase used is "Strengthening a city of cities." This is a key recognition of the importance of Sydney's town planners to bring together the cluster of cities which make up the Sydney region: each with their own merits, each with their own values. The make-up of this lecture is a focus on function and productivity; the plans are in place to improve upon Sydney's existing space for the purposes of prosperity and greater standard of living for its residents.

However, in Ingo Kumic's lecture, we are presented with an alternative view of town planning: one which questions what is more important, aesthetic form or productive form? Kumic provides the examples of New York and Dubai whilst discussing the political ramifications of asking such a question. In New York, he argues, function has taken pride of place over form, suggesting then that New York is less attractive than Dubai, where he argues that form has been given the priority over function. However, he also questions how long a city such as Dubai can prosper; it is a relatively young city by comparison to New York, which is well established as one of the world's foremost business proprietaries. The implication here is that function over form promotes a more sustainable city and, indeed, his conclusion demonstrates this: "The latter [form] must be subordinate to the former [function] in order to maintain good brand equity." However, whilst Kumic is making a clear claim that function takes priority over form, he is also saying that there is still room for form in planning and indeed, for many cities such as New York and Dubai, their form is what attracts millions of dollars' worth of tourism trade.

So, Kumic's view that function is more important than form appears to tally neatly with the view from Fensham. A city's primary function is to be a productive space for its residents, and this is demonstrated fully by Fensham's discussion of Sydney's expansion: in 2005, the focus for improvements to be made to Sydney seemed to be better connecting links. However, the plans being made for 2036 seems to want to strengthen Sydney through improvements and so the focus shifts to the function of the economy, housing and improving a standard of living for its residents. Like

Dubai, Sydney is a relatively young city also but unlike Dubai, Sydney is designed to be a high-functioning city which is growing up healthily, whereas Dubai, whilst it is beautiful, is built entirely around aesthetic form which causes there to be questions concerning its sustainability – if a city's design is lacking in function concern, how long will its wealth be sustained by its reputation? If Dubai's wealth prospers because of the value it adds to a business from a political standpoint, how long will its form be able to sustain that before it becomes tired and businesses move elsewhere? These are the questions which are raised by Kunic, whilst Fensham seems to be addressing the answers through his presentation of Sydney as being a modern city preoccupied with function rather than form.

The two lectures, whilst addressing different cities, are essentially presenting the same question: what is more important, function or form? Both lectures appear to answer the question with the same answer: function. However, there seems to be an undercurrent to Kunic's lecture with a thinly veiled view that form is still a priority, albeit a lesser one. In this sense, I think both lectures are required to be able to form a rounded understanding of what is important in town planning, however, Fensham's lecture demonstrates a stronger view of how Sydney, as one of the planet's youngest cities, is taking the view that its function must prevail and is planning an overhaul which will strengthen the city by 2036, and ultimately will preserve the city's sustainability for an extended period of time – if not improving upon its already excellent reputation.

References

Kumic, Ingo. Urban Design and the Making of the City. 2011. PDF File.

Fensham, Peter. Who Designs The City? Planners??? 2011. PDF File.