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President

State of the Profession Address

48th ISOCARP Congress

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Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Good afternoon to everyone.

Three years ago, when in Porto I accepted the high responsibility of been president of this Society, I did refer to my first days as "Isocarpian" in 1975, during the 11th Congress in Edinburgh, Scotland.

I also referred on how those times were, and how this association was organized in order to respond to the behavior of that society.

Those were the days of the worshipping of suburbia.

Those were the days of an Economy based in low cost energy and the utilization of natural resources in a way that it seemed that they will never finish.

The use of the car, as main transportation mode, forced life to the outskirts, causing a huge dereliction of town centers, and an enormous sprawl of the urban fabric.

Society was thinking in other values, and cities were building under that line of judgment and behaving.

Planners of the time were somehow responding to those needs and values.

Le Corbusier and the modernism movement were the credo in architecture and planning, The Chart of Athens, Chandigarh, Brasilia and other examples all over the planet.

Were the swinging 50's and 60's, no one had taken its time to set a step back and think, seriously, on the future that they were building with such a planned present,

This went on and on, until the society woke up with the energy crisis of the 70's and the Bruntland Report of the 80's.

These two events are to me a turning point on the planning profession.

The needs of society had now changed dramatically and we, in the planning profession are overwhelmed and surpassed by the real life effects in cities.

The magic word "Urbanization" had now stroked us.

We know and we have constantly listen to experts, in this and other spaces of reflection, that in 20 years time there will be another 2000 million urbanites.

Today, planning is almost always arriving late, once the facts are there, we the planners, want to arrange them, reality is always more crude and cruel than fiction.

Under this scenario we ought to be named “arrangers” instead of “planners”.

Nevertheless, the key question remains.

Why we almost always arrive late?

I don't have the answer, but it appears to me that it is because we, in the planning profession, still designing and planning cities as we were in the past two centuries, when the requirements of society were different, as it were the speed of change of the economy, the social structures and the technology available for the urbanite.

We want to cure a different patient with the same medicine.

We are using the same old paradigm proposed by the Athens Chart and the modern movement in the early 20th century.

We need a new way of looking at things, we need to think together with society what is what it is wanted and how is it that we can deliver that.

The state of the profession address is traditional for the outgoing president; it is supposed that I will give a view of how our profession is performing and what is the way forward.

I can tell you that in my opinion, as outgoing president, today, our profession is in the state of comma, in intensive care.

We are not delivering the right proposals of solution to the challenges that we are facing, urbanization, urban poverty, urban livability, expensive energy, etc.

We do not have the right tools, we are applying 19th and 20th century solutions to 21st century problems.

It is clear that that is not the right medicine.

Under this line of thinking, to my understanding we in ISOCARP as a Think Tank in urban matters, we ought to embark ourselves in a double track line of work.

On the one hand, we ought to try to understand the causes and effects of the urbanization phenomenon and apply some new and imaginative ways and tools for immediate action.

On the other hand, in parallel, we must do research, pure research, pure science on what and how society is living and what their future expectations are, and what are the resources, technical, social and economical that we have at our disposition.

We planners can help to change the paradigm of how cities are design and constructed and we can identify the necessary tools to achieve these objectives.

These are different views on the same facts.

Is Revolution against, Evolution.



Is Change against Trends

Is The Cities of the Future, instead of The Future of Cities.

To me, ISOCARP must be at the forefront of these thinking and produce knowledge that must be disseminated in order to help accelerate the process.

We in ISOCARP should be trying also to find the way, the new way of doing things, a new way of understanding the phenomenon of urbanization that can be planned.

We in ISOCARP have always tried to be at the forefront of planning thinking and planning practice, and we always have.

We have organized 48 Congresses with themes that demanded the review of the values that were present at their own time, always looking at the possible and foreseeable future.

We now need to enter into the global discussion and have our voice strongly heard on this respect.

While we are considering a decision in order to act, the world outside still rolling and millions of new urbanites are pouring into urban areas. We must be fast and enter into action as soon as possible.

In this context, ISOCARP has to review its structures urgently, in order to be able to face these challenges if we want to remain in the edge of the planning thinking and practice, as we always have.

Several opportunities for ISOCARP have arisen in order to generate knowledge and have our strong voice be heard.

To my understanding the most important one at this point is the significant and close relation that we have with both, the World Urban Campaign, as lead partners and members on our own right of its steering committee, and the close relation developed in the last years with UN-Habitat.

We have in front of us, in 2016, the UN-Conference Habitat III, where key decisions in urban development for the next 50 years are to be taken in order to have the member countries convert them as policy.

We in ISOCARP need to be confronted and positively respond to the issues that were put on our table for discussion.

HABITAT III must be the Conference in which we, the planners, are formally included in the Habitat III argumentation with a solid, experienced and strong voice.

This is the historical point in which we in ISOCARP are confronted to participate in the creation and generation of urban policies for the next 50 years.

It is the time of the planners.

We are the experts, we have the responsibility.

In our hands as planners, is the identification of a New Paradigm for the city of the 21st century, the City of the Future.

If we do not act at this historic moment in our capacity as professionals, maybe the crucial decisions that will generate urban policy for the next 50 years would be taken by the governments' bureaucrats and regulators, and not by the planners with the foreseen consequences.

This is our time to have something to say and really influence the future of cities through the generation of planning concepts that can be converted into public policies.

Maybe in this way we can recuperate our profession from the state that it is at the moment and be again at the top of the decision process.

Considering this scenario, there are several actions that ought to be taken, by ISOCARP along the lines planned.

We should lead the planning profession, with the necessary adjustments, to this new stage.

In order to do that we need to revitalize our structures, we just cannot remain with a format that was designed in 1965.

That was the task that I have set myself three years ago.

The State of the Society

In 50 years a lot of water has passed under the bridge, and it is clear now for us that any of our colleagues of that time that could be present today could not recognize our present society.

We started as a group of friends interested in Planning, with the common problem of the reconstruction of cities and city life, mainly of European origin, and what we have now is a society of professionals with a global reach with members in more than 85 countries.

Our Articles of Association were adopted in 1965 and have survived more or less intact since then.

In my inauguration address I asked for answers to some fundamental questions.

On these basis the structure of the organization has been revised, and with such proposed adjustments, the Articles of Association must be adequate to the enhanced structure and the new vision for the 21st Century.

It must be acknowledged at the outset, that the current Articles have served the Society without a major amendment for almost 50 years.

However, as it was noted by our colleagues of the Sydney Group, it can also be observed that the Society's management depends to a significant degree upon custom and practice which has evolved irrespective of the Articles.

In short, there are some things we now do which previously we didn't; and there are other things which we are supposed to do which we don't do at all.



In view of this context, a detailed strategy was proposed, a possible path to be followed for the next 20 years, a new format of our operating structures, for the 21st century, based on the three main columns that hold our view of our society, gathering, generating and disseminating knowledge about cities.

The document describes in detail several tracks of action in order to update the society, which have been discussed, adjusted and have to be adopted as soon as possible in order to have a clear route map that will lead the organization to a new way of doing things according with the new times.

The product of this work, including several points proposed by the members in the first round of discussion, has been in our website for the last two years, open to all for debate and analysis, unfortunately with not much attention from our members. I have to confess.

Clearly, any change generates agreement and opposition, as it is the case, and healthy argumentation generates better results.

However we ought to be convinced that changes are crucial for the well been of any organization. We cannot discuss endlessly before making a decision. There must be a limit for taking action.

The world outside still rolling while we deliberate and we cannot stay immobile, involved in a never-ending debate because of the fear to change, or by the will of some to obstruct the process, based in incomprehensible interests, as it has been the case in the last couple of years.

We need to dare and decide.

All our members must protect our society from those that will only want the shine of the position without the responsibility of service, as this organization has been suffering in the recent past.

The accountability and the team work are indispensable for the correct flow of actions within the organization.

The society needs the help and support of all its members to be at the place that it deserves.

We need to keep up with the needs of the times.

Finally, I must thank the dedicated participation of our members that while in ExCo; in the last years they wisely did and have expressed their views in order to make this society a better place to be.

To our efficient and excellent Secretariat from whom I only received kindness and attentions and without whom I could not have performed my responsibilities,

To the incoming president, I wish her the best in the benefit of our society and its members.

This is my vision of the state of the profession ... One must look at the future, the past was as it was.

As Thomas Jefferson said

“...I prefer the dream of the future than the history of the past...”

Thank you very much, and God bless you all.....

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