

R. Buckminster Fuller: The architect as world planner (excerpt)

On the occasion of the congress of the International Union of Architects in London in 1961 Richard Buckminster Fuller spoke on the task of the architect in the present world situation. As thirty years before, Fuller developed a planning programme that was to span the entire world. He projected the idea of a world in which the means of existence had been made completely available to mankind. The architect, he said, must become a world planner who has arrived at a fixed hierarchy of processes in the world and on the basis of this hierarchy practises world town planning with all the scientific aids at his disposal.

... I propose that the architectural departments of all the universities around the world be encouraged by the UIA to invest the next ten years in a continuing problem of how to make the total world's resources serve 100% of humanity through competent design.

The general theory of education at present starts students off with elementary components and gradually increases the size of the complex of components with which the student will be concerned. The scheme is to go from the particular towards the whole but seems never to reach the whole. In many of the architectural schools the first-year student is given a problem in terms of a country town and has to plan and design the buildings for that country town. The next year he must do a larger town, a small industrial town. In the third year he is engaged in a large industrial city, and in his fourth year he is engaged with larger cities, such as London or New York. The schools never reach out to national, let alone world problems. Local town planning is almost everywhere invalidated by the sweep of world events. The automobile highway cloverleaf programmes are inadequate to the concept of total man being advantaged with his own vehicle; parking problems continually frustrate and negate the too-local horizon of town planning.

The first year's total world planning by the students and its designed implementation may be expected to disclose great amateurishness and inadequacies, but not only will the criticism come from the architectural profession, it will also be evoked from the politicians, from the economists, the industrialists, excited by its treading on their doorsteps, out of which criticism the next year's round of world designing by the students may be greatly advantaged. The second, third, and fourth years should show swift acceleration in the comprehension of the problem and the degree of satisfaction of the problem.

The world planning by the students must be predicated upon the concept of first things first, upon a scheduled hierarchy of events.

The comprehensive world resources data now exist in a number of establishments, but is primarily available to all the universities of the world through UNESCO. What UNESCO does not have, it is in a good position to direct the researcher to successfully acquire.

At the present moment in history, what is spoken of as foreign policy by the respective nations consists essentially of their plans to bring about conditions which would uniquely foster their respective unique kinds of survival in the Malthusian 'you or me-ness'. * For any one of the foreign policies of any of the nations or groups of nations to become a world plan, would mean that approximately half of the world's nations would have to surrender, and would mean the development of a highly biased plan as applied to the whole. In the nature of political compromises, it is logical to assume that the foreign policy of any one nation will never succeed in satisfying comprehensive world planning.

It is clearly manifest, however, in this Sixth Congress of the International Union of Architects that the architects are able to think regarding such world planning in a manner transcendental to any political bias. My experience around the world and amongst the students tells me that the students themselves tend always to transcend political bias and that all of them are concerned with the concept of making the world work through competent design.

In much investigation and enquiry I have had no negative response to the programme of organization of the student capability to the raising of the performance of the world resources to serve 100% of humanity by peaceful, comprehensive laboratory experiment and progressive design evolution.

It is probable that if the architectural students are progressively disciplined to breadth of capability in chemistry, physics, mathematics, bio-chemistry, psychology, economics, and industrial technology, that they will swiftly and ably penetrate the most advanced scientific minds resident in the university, and as their programmes evolve from year to year in improving capability, that the students will be able to bring the highest integral scientific resources of man to bear upon their solutions of world town planning and its design instrumentation and operational regeneration.

The next Congress should then be almost completely preoccupied with reviewing all such inventories and plans – with this first stocktaking of what man has to do, and what he has to do it with! What will appear will unquestionably be world news of the first order, and not only world news but the news that men all around the Earth have waited for. The common goals for all to work toward will be reduced from empty words to simple physical objectives.

* Malthus, the British economist, 1766–1834. Malthus proved that the population of the Earth increases in geometrical progression, the food supply only in arithmetical progression.