UNDERSTANDING DESTINATION DESIGN & COASTAL ARCHITECTURE

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The amount of writing purporting to address concerns in destination design has been very limited in both depth and breadth, over the entire history of literature on the topic. Historians and architects have been less diligent in understanding and interpreting the needs of this complex and creative design field. However, the literature in support of hospitality, travel and tourism management and science is very scholarly and authoritative; it does provide some insight into design potentials, and is a major component of the destination designer's knowledge-base.

In fact, the phrase "destination design" itself, has not settled into a definitive set of descriptive words or phrases. However, the Institute of Destination Architects and Designers congeals, without apologies, the numerous terms which permeate research journals and professional studies, ranging from recreation and leisure to theme park and coastal design, into the professional field herein referred to as Destination/Coastal Architecture.

The young or seasoned professional in numerous other fields of design and architecture have specialized in this discipline with titles peculiar to their offices, such as theme architects, leisure architects, resort architects, etc., not recognizing, necessarily, the out-growth of a new profession of architecture dealing with vacationscapes. Having established, indirectly, the discipline on this plane, the Institute has responsibilities to further explain the design philosophy's parities and differences, gleaned from comparison studies which substantiate the irrepressible vitality of this practice area and its distinction from and comity with landscape architecture.

The discipline of landscape architecture, like most broad disciplines, such as building architecture and other design fields, is reluctant to assert its capabilities in specialized capacities, and prefers to maintain aspirational goals as generalists. Here, too, destination architecture is considered by IDAD to be a

superspecialty, which the Institute defines to mean an outgrowth of numerous fields (i.e. landscape architecture, design, environmental and theatrical arts, and most importantly, hospitality, travel and tourism management). The phrase is an umbrella concept which includes the aforementioned specialties of resort architects, scenographers, artists, amusement park designers, travel and tourism managers, environmental scientists, and marine researchers, etc. However, the discipline deals predominantly with large-scale developments in a regional or geographical area, as well as site-specific designs. Most of these designs are too vast to be confined to a single structure; therefore, much of the field is predicated on progressive landscape architecture theory and practice.

The vastly-differing philosophical premises upon which land architects justify their activities should be examined and understood by anyone, regardless of professional qualifications, in order to minimize counterproductive conflicts within their planned destination architecture enlightenment efforts. For the benefit of those seeking further verification of their qualifications to practice in this field, the numerous practice theories will be briefly discussed. A professional or student interested in destination/coastal architecture might expect to encounter various and often incompatible philosophies among designers.

Design with nature or natural ecology could be said to have begun in the 1960's, where Ian McHarg, in his well-known text, skewed the landscape architecture discipline, through the focused agenda of environmental management. It is possible that errors accrued during this period of restrictive design thinking undernourished critical intuitive skills, a major prerequisite for effective practice in destinations.

During the 1970's and 80's, many architects re-examined the admittedly erroneous minimization of design in favor of scientific inquiry. They began to question the purely scientific analysis and investigative planning approaches purported by authorities to be "good design process" during this creative slump of the era.

Leading institutions of design education began to recognize that good process did not necessarily produce good design, as could be seen in the poor design development and finish of architectural presentations. They reaffirmed that architecture, if practiced correctly, approaches problems comprehensively through holistic consideration of all extenuating circumstances. They began to favor new architectural thinking which was not anti-visionary; and championed the importance of having creative intellectuals in the field who could look at problems interrelatedly, using the higher order of synthesis thinking.

As architects began to realize that "leave no mark" essentially could be interpreted not as conservation, but as potential insignificance in the world of architecture, they turned to form-making. This further exacerbated the discipline, by creating sculptural engineers and form-builders, which was a paradoxical position in which to find the profession heading. After all, they had just rejected an educational philosophy that many felt had churned out architects who were better qualified as ecologists than designers. Although good analysis, planning and form development are all, in and of themselves, supportive of a designer's effort in the destination field, they are strictly among the baseline of decisions to be considered, not determinants of the design itself.

Moving into the 1990's, it became appealing to architects to consider design forms as instructive or educational devices, or reveal what had been previously lost to a community or culture through, for example, the literal excavation of hidden waterways or the reversing of numerous urban processes. Included here was a preoccupation for greenways or other urban design complements, which soon fell to criticism as these architectural constructs proved to require massive amounts of servicing, with limited design effectiveness.

In general, many in the field adopted numerous misdirected systematic thinking techniques over the past century, which can still be seen in the galleries of architecture schools today. Some

landscape architecture work is entirely composed of a geography of maps and boundaries, with a noticeable absence of design constructs, in favor of what is essentially a geographer's and statistician's presentation. Names of movements are too numerous to be mentioned here, but one pursuing destination design through the current philosophy mix at design universities needs to appreciate the company he/she might encounter and the thinking engendered by the past history just discussed. It may be, in fact, precarious to investigate meaning, pleasure, or happiness, as these questions in themselves may bring on numerous responses.

Destination design embraces the design as a product of the architect's intentions for an experiential character which will encourage positive moments for the visitor. This approach accepts that perception of tourists and users may not always compliment the intended perspective, as individuals are products of culture and life exposures. However, destination design confirms that universal factors can be identified which produce reactions of meaning, pleasure and happiness.

Furthermore, Vitruvius cited as desirable architectural qualities, "commodity, firmness and delight" and did not predicate this goal as being dependent upon culture. It is in this historic context that the seeds of the destination design philosophy can be said to originate. Destination architects recognize through a more careful study of the history of art and design, that traditionally, sensory and experiential reactions by users of a design do condition or move the viewer, causing him/her to experience pleasure, excitement or a series of emotional responses which collectively can be attributed to "fun factors" in the design.

This being understood, it is also equally possible to fail to recognize the happiness potentials in the design's effect on users, and produce normally undesirable (unless planned for) anxiety, gloom or contempt. As J.W. von Goethe once commented, "Art should not simply speak to the mind through the senses, it must also satisfy the senses themselves." This is

a statement which intentionally or unintentionally touches on the very essence of destination design, and can be observed in the most successful resorts, theme parks and coastal developments.

The destination design approach makes planning and scientific analysis submissive to intuitive problem solving and the creative process. Standard systematic planning methodologies are minimized in favor of project-specific pathways. Statistical and analytical generalizations are not relied-upon without ground-truthing of actual variables. Innovation is encouraged within the project's framework. It is inclusive of fun, experience and entertainment potentials in a design; and it considers project profitability and income-generating priorities. Human issues are paramount for the reasons of human ecology, health, safety, welfare, economics, and cultural and community advancement through design, hospitality, travel and tourism management.

Quality of life is perhaps architecture's overlooked classical anthem as a people-oriented practice, akin to medicine and law. However, destination architects and other designers have strong inner-directed personalities, being sure of their own worth and contribution, demonstrating good associative skills and adequate analytical or logical skills. Leading designers, throughout history in this discipline, have shown eclectic interests and often roam far in science and engineering. Such designers are "interested in everything," according to the National Academy of Sciences, in Designing for Competitive Advantages.

The Institute is in the process of reviewing schools of design, internationally, with evolving criteria through all mechanisms available. These are opinion-based analyses, but can serve the beginning professional in his endeavors to locate the best centers of learning for the pursuit of this field. Those interested in destination/coastal architecture should refer to the Institute's resources at www.idad.org.