Teaching integrated Architecture and Urban Design using tectonic thinking as a pedagogical method

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Recent challenges related to urban densification, climate adaptations, change in infrastructure etc. poses new requirements for architects to join concerns of architecture and urban design when shaping the contemporary city. To this end, we are as design teachers obliged to ask how we educate and prepare future generations of architects to maneuver within this field, without allowing students to subject to a technical problem-solving attitude without any sensitivity for architectural quality, nor to an aesthetic fixation incompatible with technical insights essential to address the challenges facing the contemporary city.

In addressing this question, this talk presents an educational agenda intended to teach students means to link knowledge of technique with visions for architectural quality while establishing that any design in the city should be an act of building on the city, a continuation of what is already there. The means for teaching is through an engaging with tectonic thinking as a pedagogical method that links the task of developing a quality-oriented conceptual design following an in-depth reading of a site. Tectonics is
the link between the laws of nature and ideas embodied in form, it is the art of construction and take advantage of insights in technology, materials, structures and constructions, as means to create new meanings and qualities. Thus, if turning students’ attention towards qualities, and through tectonics its link to technological, structural, constructional and material means, will it enable an integrated attitude toward designing the contemporary city?

This question will be treated through a presentation of an undergraduate course in architecture and urban design at Aalborg University that is developed from the above educational agenda. The talk will engage in a discussion and speculate in the opportunities of teaching tectonic thinking in the understanding and design of the contemporary city.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Elias Melvin Christiansen is a Danish architect M.Sc., and are currently enrolled as a Ph.d. student at Aalborg University. His main interest of study is the city, with its combination of built, unbuilt and grown structures, and how this combination can result in various qualities that goes beyond design as a problem-solver. In his studies he is pursuing a quality-based approach to understanding and designing the city through a study of the theories of tectonics, a theory that links concerns of quality, like atmospheres, meanings, experience and bodily involvement in space, with structures, constructions, materials and technology. Elias’ research has been published by the International Network Ambiances, figured as an installation at Aarhus Festuge and exhibited at DAC - Danish architectural Centre. Beside his studies Elias has been teaching Architecture and Urban Design at undergraduate and graduate level, and participated in architectural competitions in Denmark and Scandinavia.