The Meaning in Seeing: Visual Sustainability in the Built Environment

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Meaning is the luggage, sustainability is the leaving. Visual sustainability is simply the process by which people are sustained and enriched in daily life through the visual relationship they hold dear to their surroundings. Aesthetics in cities is only important if visually rich, which is only important if meaningful. Visual meaning is only important if sustainable. Visual sustainability is only important if it serves human life. Morphology-based claims that 75% of the world’s population will be urbanised by 2050 are compounded by extended urbanisation theories more focused on process. We have created forests full of strange objects that stare back; surrounded by artefacts validating our existence but no longer enriching our lives. Ignoring all warnings of this

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creeping phenomenon the perpetuation of corruption of meaning and artistic expression continues unabated. As people wrestle with the scientification of their existence, cities increasingly symbolise compression chambers of consciousness, emotion, alienation, and isolation. This study avoids the developmental and environmental bias in modern-day sustainability; focusing instead on absence of meaning. There is more to ‘meaning in seeing’ than visual literacy or visualisation. In bridging theory with practice we must reset priorities, replacing sustainability driven by sustainability, with sustainability driven by pedagogy; through affordance properties “created to support activity” and meaning. We should look beyond a fallacy of ambiguity, towards epistemically objective science of ontologically subjective domains of knowledge. In this study, relational validity of meaning is explored through the lens

References


of direct perception. Now is the time to make the connection that appears to be absent from urban discourse, between visual richness and sustainability; reconciling non-visual planning processes with the concept of sustainable visual meaning. We must promote the effectiveness, for the builders of our cities, of visual sustainability planning — as well as — the importance, for sustainability planners, of building visually responsive cities.

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Pieter de Kock is a PhD research student at the University of Lincoln, UK. Coining the phrase visual sustainability, Pieter’s work is focused on visual richness, visual meaning, and visually sustainable urban environments. He is an Australian registered architect (ARBV 15737) with a master’s degree in urban design from the University of Westminster. Pieter is experienced in a wide range of project types and sizes spanning several countries. He has experience of different cultures and personality types and possesses excellent skills in several different software packages; including 3D, desktop publishing, and graphic design. Pieter’s project management skills reflect a pragmatic and resilient work ethic which are key to meeting deadlines and project performance criteria. Pieter is currently active on ResearchGate. Featured research includes a working paper on visual sustainability as well as co-authoring ‘Standing out in a crowd: Big Data to produce new forms of publicness.’

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