

Sust-DANE-able

SUSTAINABILITY in DANISH ARCHITECTURE – A Pragmatic and holistic approach to social, economic and environmental sustainability.

'Sust-DANE-able' is a presentation of projects by 18 leading Danish architectural practices. The aim of sust-DANE-able is to present existing as well as planned examples of the Danish approach to 'sustainability'. The projects have been chosen in collaboration with the practices, in order to represent the **pragmatic-holistic** approach which epitomises Danish architecture at its best. The projects vary greatly and span from product designs for waste disposal to masterplan designs for financial districts in order to show the wide range of works created by today's Danish architects.

Architects in Denmark

Danish architects are very conscious of their artistic approach, which is matched with a proactive, pragmatic and democratic methodology. This requires more action and less talking in a professional field influenced by an ongoing and strong professional discussion on architectural quality and demands.

The body of Danish architects is homogeneous. Denmark only has two schools of architecture, and all architects are trained at these two closely connected educational establishments. Most Danish architects move almost effortlessly within a group of high calibre architectural design practices. They are very loyal to each other even if they work for different firms.

As a result there are many common features in Danish architecture, but as the exhibition shows it also generates a great variety of solutions based on highly advanced and creative designs.

Thus, one of the main characteristics of Danish architecture is an insistence on architectural quality. Buildings and cities must above all be lastingly attractive. Longevity is a key to sustainability and is based on an inherent tradition for social responsibility and resources, as well as sense of economy – in other words a *pragmatic and holistic approach to **social, economic and environmental sustainability***.

These three aspects of sustainability are integrated on equal terms in the working methodology of the majority of Danish architects as qualities and values in urban planning, master planning, building design and object design. The exhibition is a manifestation of this integration, and the projects on display have been chosen on the basis of these concepts.

Social sustainability

In Denmark sustainability does not oblige the population to change its habits. Instead, the Danes strive to develop techniques to make their habits sustainable, adapting design to desirable lifestyles. They aspire to create highly desirable urban living environments and 'comfortable cities'. The political system and social ethics make the Danes aim for democratic and accessible structures for all.

Economic sustainability

There has always been an inherent awareness of the use of resources in Danish building traditions – hence, the architectural tradition is anything but extravagant. The ability to create architecture from, or rather through, restrained means is typical for Danish architects - using the relatively few resources at hand in a reasonable, but also artistically coherent way has always been the premise. Simplicity and a sense of economy rank above opulence, thus making (economic) sustainability a basic parameter in Danish architecture.

Environmental sustainability

Climate conditions in Denmark are challenging. For many years, Danish building codes have given priority to important issues regarding indoor climate and energy, as well as daylight optimization. Since the 1970's Denmark has had a strong tradition for energy-conscious construction - building one house effectively means building two as the house has an inner and an outer shell. Traditional and durable materials are integrated into new constructions in an innovative way. Moreover, it has always been important to focus upon the contextual setting – issues such as scale, climate, geography, landscape, urban scape.

These terms are key points for interpreting sustainability and contain three key words for the way Danish architects work: **context, community and innovation**. In generating form, what do we do with regard to *context*, extract from culture, geography, climate, politics and history, how does this comply with *community*, democracy and human scale, and how can we transform and *innovate* this into architecture that represents our age and reacts to this age as well as the future without compromising our past?

Vibeke Grupe Larsen, curator