

EFAP VILNIUS 2013

New developments in French architectural policies

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As an « expression of culture », as we say in French, architecture is one of the ways the unity of our civilization shows its best face, and it's important for Europe , Culture – and architecture- that we are able to hold this meeting today.

The EFAP is today alive and well – even better than it used to be recently I guess, and I think we can all say thank you to those who prepared the new chapter of its life which is beginning, after a crisis of which some consequences are still to be tackled ; ; it is very important to my government to see EFAP going on a new basis, coming back in many aspects to the original philosophy of this network.

Our (attention) to the future of EFAP is linked to the will of our Government to give a new impulse to architectural policy, which Minister Aurélie Filipetti has decided to give as soon as she entered in charge at Spring 2012, and that she first expressed publicly in Venice, on the occasion of the Biennale of architecture.

One year after I think it's possible to present the main axes of a new policy about architects training and architectural research, about the dissemination and support of architecture in our country, and about a special interest towards the stimulation of new architecture and protection of the rights of the architects as authors of their buildings.

Architects training and architectural research

As you may know, the French system of post graduate teaching is spared between two main branches : University and « great schools » .

The first looks familiar to most of you, with an (obligation) to welcome every young boy or girl who succeeds to the final exam of school system ; it delivers BA, Master degrees, and PHD and houses laboratories. So called « great schools » select their students, used to deliver their own diplomas, and to do few research. Most French ingeneers come from this system. Architecture schools are middle of the road : not included in universities, less selectives than ingeneers schools, they turned in 2007 to deliver a BA and a master degree, and to contract with universities to deliver PHD and have laboratories.

In the time behind, a very important movement is changing the basis of the french system, getting its two branches closer and closer by converging towards the international model of post graduate teaching, which needs to take the best from each part : universities pay more attention to prepare students to jobs, and Great Schools invest in research.

The architecture schools have to do both, even if the first aim is more traditional to them and more easy to target granted that the rating of alumni getting permanent jobs in their sector after three years is excellent.

In Venice, the minister announced that the National Schools of Architecture should, as the university did simultaneously, hold a national debate about their future ; so was done in five regional meetings ; a national Comitee, in which some European colleagues kindly accepted to

work, was chaired by Member of parliament Feltesse who presented in May his report. And me and my team had to turn this report into a (feuille de route ») ; do you say a road book ?

Three main issues or targets are proposed : a closer partnership with the universities, a more academic looking governance and management of the schools themselves, and an evolution of the situation of the teachers, giving them some time paid to do research instead of working in the lab voluntarily.

About the contents of teaching, a stress was put on the necessity to enhance international cooperation, notably with European schools, through more partnerships, workshops abroad, welcoming of colleagues from other countries – and, important for us as you can hear, better teaching of English language. The project and teaching through project remains the backbone of training, but we see the necessity to improve some other forms of more technical teaching , giving to future architects the capacity to cope with high technologies and work together with high level engineers notably in energy and climate technologies which are and will more and more be crucial.

As you may know the sustainable development is to be added to the list of know how requested by the european directive about architects training.

We are not so bad in this field in France, and were proud to win last year the solar decathlon contest with a team led by the Grenoble School of architecture.

Dissemination and support of architecture is the second priority on which my department is working to give a new impulse to government's policy of architecture.

Opposite to other policies, even in the field of culture, this one doesn't rely on a complete and pyramidal structure of administrative services. My team in Paris is excellent but small – say twenty five people – and we don't have many counterparts in the regional branches of the Ministry , called regional Directorates of cultural affairs or DRAC. The architectural services that are relatively numerous and widespread are mainly devoted to the conservation of heritage, and we have to (mobiliser) different networks such as the local councils for architecture, urban planning and environment, the regional councils of the order of architects, the « maisons de l' architecture » created by this order in several regions, and others.

We are also in charge of the application of a label « City or area of arts and history », which is given to those local authorities which organise a set of dissemination and educative actions about heritage, architecture, and urban planning. This label is quite popular because supposed to be attractive for tourism, and very efficient for a minimal cost.

The minister has recently issued a (circulaire) to her local representatives, to explain them the great aims and means of this cultural policy, which is the first since this mission has been transferred from the Ministry of Building and urban planning to Culture.

The leading idea is that the more the public is educated to architecture the more ordinary people not only choose to use architects to build their houses – as you may know this is only requested for houses larger than 170 square meters – but encourage the people they elect in charge of urban planning to improve the quality of the projects for buildings and for the conception of public equipments and spaces. Aldermen and people in charge of urban planning are also a target for better awareness of their responsibility about urban landscape, and the opportunities of using the capacity of architects to deal with those questions.

This is very important for France at this moment because President Hollande has put a strong priority on massive and fast development of new housing, with a stress on density of urban planning. There will be money for that, and the urban laws are being reformed to lower the controls and checks on building programs. Therefore, we face a risk of local decisions paying attention only to rapidity of building and eventually energetic performance, but forgetting the quality of architecture.

Therefore the minister insists on the necessity for her services to coordinate the actions of the networks previously named – notably the local councils of architecture, whose mission is to advise for free the ordinary people who intend to build, and the local authorities, especially the small ones which don't have any trained people in their staff – as you may know France is still a country of 36 000 boroughs, in charge of urban planning and who deliver the building permits. Occasionally, this help can be completed by funding professional studies committed by the cities.

But as you know elected people are mainly listening to the voters – that's called democracy and it's the worst system after all others - and it's important to disseminate architectural culture to stimulate the demand for ambitious architectural policies ; this begins at school and we support and encourage many programs of cultural education for children of all ages. But adults should not be left aside and the ministry supports also many exhibitions, visits , conferences and so to promote architecture and give people the opportunity to appreciate today's creations. In Paris we have the « Cité de l' Architecture et du patrimoine » which celebrates iconic contemporary architects like recently Riciotti ...

Another good way to disseminate the interest for contemporary creation is awards : most of the regions have their own ones, and at the national level we have the grand prix national every two years and a special award for young architects called AJAP – young architects and landscapers albums ...

More recently we have developed different programs to improve and spread the knowledge of recent and contemporary architecture ; we made a census of the more interesting « grands ensembles », those big housing programs from the sixties and seventies that are often strongly depreciated as perfect sceneries for urban riots even if some of them are masterworks , and obtained some good results to make people who live there and even local authorities proud of them and therefore able to take better care of them and rediscover their qualities. Some famous (rehabilitations) like the Bois le pretre tower by Lacaton Vassal show that destruction is not only costly and opposite to sustainability but sometimes silly in terms of quality of life for inhabitants. We are now beginning a census of the most interesting (lotissements) .

We prepare also a new brand of the label given to what we call « twentieth century heritage » , a label which is not a protection like the Historical monuments list, but only a mark to make people around aware of exceptional recent buildings.

We assume that if those examples of recent architecture are best known and considered it will make easier to introduce present creation in the cities and suburbs, and imply the architectural way of thinking in urban planning, as we were able to with the Greater Paris international workshop some years ago.

Finally we see more and more interesting buildings in our country, and the question is now what do we do when their users or owners decide that they have to be converted ?

The rights of architects and their intellectual property is a question more and more often addressed when living architects see their works threatened by misconducted renovations.

The French law doesn't give a safe answer to all situations, and fortunately most of them are dealt through gentlemen's agreements between the first architect and the new one – quite often the same which is the simplest solution – previously compulsory thanks to the « droit de suite » (right to follow ?) which was suppressed by a european directive. But conflicts happen and are not easy to solve ; in these cases we can only propose to organise discussions between parts and try to imagine middle of the road (compromise).

The will of the Minister is to create in every region a (mediation) committee which could give expert advices on the architectural interest of the building, and eventually, in very special cases, propose to protect it as a historical monument. This will introduce in the discussion not only the interests of the users and the right of the architect, but the public interest of architecture.

This public interest is our common concern, and I hope that this short presentation, in a strange language I hope you could understand from time to time, sounded sometimes familiar to some of you : I guess indeed that most of the questions we try to deal with are also on your agendas, and would be happy to share best practices with you.

Thank you for your attention.