

DR WINSTON MOORE

Acceptance speech on becoming an Honorary Fellow of the ABE



I would like to begin by thanking Patrick Reddin for bringing me into contact with the ABE, an institution whose interests I have helped promote in Latin America. Through Patrick and the ABE I have become familiarised with the concept of the Built Environment about which I would like to talk today.

The Built Environment is highly regulated and structured in the United Kingdom, but in Latin America the concept and practice is in a process of constant change.

In Latin America the built environment can be contrasted between the construction of "planned" architecturally sophisticated cities like the Brazilian capital Brasilia which started in 1956 based on the vision of architect Lucio Costa who put forward a "draft" proposal based on the urbanistic concept of founding a city in the wilderness. Costa said the building of a capital city in the wilderness was similar to the process of colonial discovery and conquest; for this reason it should not be based on a concept of regional planning as the founding of Brasilia would in time lead to the planned development of a whole region.

Costa drew a distinction between *urbs* (city) and *civitas* – which possesses the attributes inherent to a capital city.

"For this to be possible, the planner must be imbued with a certain dignity and nobility of intent because from this fundamental attitude springs the sense of order, fitness and proportion which alone can confer the monumental quality in the urban scheme," Costa said.

Before proceeding to present his winning "draft" proposal for Brasilia, Costa added the following remarks that inform his view of the built environment.

"The city should be planned for orderly and efficient work, but at the same time it must be both vital and pleasing, suitable for reverie and intellectual speculation. It should be a city which over time could become the seat of government and administration, but also one of the more lucid and distinguished cultural centres in the country."

Thus, although Costa's idea of the built environment was an evolving one, his concept for the architectural design and planning of Brasilia was based on the primary gesture of conquest and of taking possession which he understood to be based on the drawing of an axis crossing at right angles – the very Sign of the Cross. Costa adapted this sign to the local topography, drainage and best possible orientation for Brazil's prospective *civitas*.

Perhaps more better known than Costa, architect Oscar Niemeyer also played a key role in the design and construction of many of Brasilia's buildings including the Congress, the Palace of Dawn, the Cathedral, the National Theatre and the University of Brasilia.

Brasilia contrasts with the massive urbanization of cities like Sao Paulo and Mexico City, and with the magical beauty of cities like Rio de Janeiro, which remains Brazil's emotional and cultural capital.

Returning to the built environment, over the last ten years Brazil's "favela" shanty towns have changed from rustic dwellings to properly built homes enjoying many essential services to improve the quality of life of their residents.

Moving to the Spanish Caribbean, Cuba has over the last four decades been working to restore Old Havana's homogenous Baroque and neoclassical ensemble of public buildings, churches, palaces and houses. The Cuban capital was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1982 and over the last ten years many old buildings have been renovated and put to new uses whilst ensuring that the city centre and key neighborhoods retain a sense of community. The façades of

many buildings have been restored, while the internal structures have been totally renovated to create functionally working buildings that improve the quality of life of residents and introduce, alongside these communities, small businesses, galleries and restaurants.

Getting closer to home in Bolivia, we can appreciate the precarious and dangerous conditions of the built environment in the seat of



government, La Paz. The city is built in a crater-like formation that suddenly appears at the edge of the Altiplano highland plateau. La Paz is home to one million people and has over 200 rivers running through it.

The residential areas are located in the city centre and in the southern district that is situated at a lower altitude and has a warmer climate. But the urban poor and working class live perched along the slopes of this crater where they have constructed precariously built brick and "adobe" – mud brick – dwellings.

Last February a freak hailstorm hit these poor districts destroying homes and schools and small businesses, causing rivers of ice-cold muddy water to converge on the city centre whose main thoroughfares – Avenida Mariscal Santa Cruz and El Prado – turned into a fast-flowing river that carried away street vendors' stalls,

vehicles, children and pedestrians, leaving 80 people dead and US\$70m worth of damage.

The ABE partnered in a Corporate Citizenship effort led by British Gas Bolivia, the British Embassy and Moore & Associates to set up seed funding to assist in the refurbishment of schools damaged by the hail storm.

This Corporate Citizenship initiative organized by British Gas Bolivia raised a total of US\$45,000 from an additional 45 sponsors, to repair the damaged schools.

The built environment is thus not only bricks and mortar, use and planning, quality and improved functionality, efficient and sustainable construction and innovative practices, it is above all about people, relationships, beliefs, hopes and fears.

A few years ago, I was working as consultant for a mining company involved in negotiations with the people of a small colonial town in southern Potosi to move it to a new location in order to access world class mineral reserves located below the town.

To approve the transfer of the town to a new location the townsfolk insisted that the mining company provide the town mayor and a small commission of delegates with a vehicle to search throughout Bolivia's western highland region for a "yachu" shaman to communicate with local mountain gods and the spirits of ancestors to ask permission for the relocation.

The right "yachu" was found in Quillacas and he was brought to the mining town where an all night vigil and shamanic ceremony was organized in the town hall. This ceremony was attended by the company's senior management who flew in by small plane from La Paz. Coca leaves were distributed for everyone to chew and alcohol

was handed to drink in small quantities as the "yachu" invoked the local mountain gods, the spirits of ancestors, the company's head office in Colorado and the American stock exchange where the company had recently achieved a successful IPO listing.

The "yachu" and his assistant then ran round the room chanting and tying a long coloured thread round the entire group. He then gathered the chewed coca leaves everyone had deposited on a weaving and after asking for money donations left the hall heading North to a secret location where he would reportedly make an offering to Mother Earth "Pachamama" and the spirits.

Before his departure he instructed everyone to stand up, remain silent and not move for ten minutes, and told company managers that when they left the hall after the ceremony had ended, that they should do so walking backwards and not turn to look North in the direction where the "Yachu" had travelled to make his offering.

This shows how consultations for a transformation of the built environment by people living in a southern Potosi mining town involved invoking local gods and the spirits of the dead.

As I am no "yachu" shaman I will not be asking the president of the ABE and members of council to stand still in silence for ten minutes while I tie them up, nor will I request that they leave this building walking backwards and not look North after I receive this award.

I would, however, like to thank you for this honour and opportunity to address you on this very special occasion. I will continue to work to promote the interests of the ABE and its members in Latin America.

Thank you.

ASSOCIATION D'EXPERTS EUROPÉENS DU BÂTIMENT ET DE LA CONSTRUCTION (AEEBC)


In November the Association was represented by Chris Dawson, Vice President and David Gibson, your Chief Executive, at a meeting of the AEEBC in Perpignan where discussions centred on the free movement of construction materials around the EU and the mobility of professionals and the extension of opportunity within Europe. Free movement of materials around the EU is taking place. However, it is essential to make sure that difficulties do not occur where materials are designed to operate in one local environment that significantly differs from those conditions that may exist where those materials are to be used within a buildings fabric.

It is essential that materials from different parts of the EU carry instructions on their use in the language of the country where they

are to be used, as well as the country of origin; emphasis being on the understanding of the conditions of use as well as any limitations. An important element for effective use of materials, across the EU, is testing and certification to agreed standards and criteria.

The meeting also considered:

- the rules for membership
- the level of qualification
- the cost of membership and
- the production of a descriptive guide about AEEBC and its membership.



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