

UK Architectural Scene and Prospect for Traditional and Classical Architecture and Urbanism

INTBAU/BAG Seminar Presentations February 9th

A)

The UK profession much like in the United States is one of the major exporters of Architectural professional service, notwithstanding the big European i.e. Spanish/French “starchitects” the British Architects. After the US normally dominate the commercial/public commission outside of the UK. Economically this sector has suffered greatly from the downturn with many firms closing or downsizing.

B)

The current situation in the UK is much like elsewhere when corporate modernism is the mainstream for commerce with the “so called cutting edge and innovation star architects who” get the larger/public commissions. Ideologically modernism dominates the institutions like RIBA and educational establishments with the former gradually being accepting of other approach such as Traditional Architecture whilst the Universities or Colleges are completely closed to such alternative, and are entirely engrossed in a self-obsessed abstract modernism.

C)

In the past decade there has been a distinct shift in the public mood away from the mainstream modernism. In major projects the public has become much more vocal in expressing their dissatisfaction. The Chelsea barracks and the rejection of the Richard Roger scheme was a particularly prominent case in which the public view prevailed.

D)

Two factors affecting the Architectural profession have emerged which have and contributed to the success and sustained growth of those of us who practice Traditional architecture.

- 1) In proportion to the number of modernist/mainstream practices traditional firms as have enjoyed greater success relative to their number, in securing high profile or large projects outside of the UK. Almost all of the larger practices like Adam Architecture, John Simpson & Partners, Quinlan Terry, Porphyrios Associates, my own firm Stanhope Gate have secured major commission in Europe, US and the Middle and Far East.
- 2) The UK market also reflects the same but in a smaller scale where Oxford and Cambridge colleges, some large scale development and mainly private residential Clients prefer to commission Classical Architecture for their projects. Traditional Urban Design and Sustainability led developments also adopt the same approach with the Duchy of Cornwall being the major client base for Traditional practices.

The future for Classical and Traditional Architecture in the UK therefore seems rather hopeful, the emergence and success of TAG in the RIBA, the expansion of INTBAU and the prominence Princes Foundation has provided a focal rallying point for the practitioners.

E)

On the political and legislative front the present government’s move to abolish the Architectural Review Committees and instigate locally led decision making on major development is opening a new chapter in the emergence of Traditional and Classical Architecture. Where we have found a natural ally in the public and their distaste for top down ratifications of projects or approvals by so called panel of experts which are normally dominated by Modernists.

F)

The principal tactic adopted by TAG in this case is to call for inclusive and pluralistic approach to commission of projects and we have been successful in driving the traditional agenda forward by

having a presence through TAG/INTBAU and other bodies within major institutions such as the RIBA. This has enabled us to present the alternative.

Ultimately and in practice the success of our approach has also been partly due to trying to engage in dialogue with our Modernist colleagues and looking for a greater convergence of ideas and finding common ground. We believe this will enhance our position and ensure that we can occupy and share the same platforms that were dominated by the mainstream accepted practice.