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The current state of Architecture in Canada

High rise glass condominiums in city centres and sprawling suburban family homes anchored around big box retail development continue to dominate the landscape, although there is talk of densifying the suburbs.

In between these two extremes within the city centres lie traditional family homes (ex. Toronto) and duplex/triplex (ex. Montreal) typologies that have been renovated and personalized according to taste. In certain neighborhoods in Montreal, an urban planning advisory committee decides on what modifications can be made to the buildings so as to ensure visual continuity and heritage considerations.

There is a growing interest in heritage conservation and an understanding that maintaining the historic elements of a building in a renovation/adaptive re-use project will increase the site's value.

New individual and large scale constructions are interested in LEED classifications (although it is not always easy to convince the client of investing in this commitment) however large expanses of glass and hi-tech 'sustainable' options predominate over traditional considerations.

The position of and attitude to traditional architecture and urban design with the rest of the profession and the public

The profession is mainly modernist with occasional eco-tendencies and considerations for the environment. However there is little discussion about traditional building approaches (although Heritage Canada gave a conference in 2009 on the relevance of building conservation to sustainability). The Building Code and even the LEED criteria doesn't encourage a true investigation of what is innately sustainable, as the profession is dominated by suppliers, standards, lobbies, etc. This situation incidentally also ostracizes the smaller and less politically powerful network of craftsmen and trades people, who generally tend away from public, bureaucratically laden projects towards small scale private ones.

Changes in the position of architecture, society, politics and economics in the last decade

During the recent economic downturn, the government provided tax incentives for home renovations and the restoration of privately owned heritage buildings. However government laws and regulations regarding municipal height restrictions, the protection of classified buildings, etc. seem to be far too easily manipulated by coercive developers and rely on public outcry for direction rather than a strict, well-selected committee of knowledgeable and committed professionals who have good design, sensitive urban planning and traditional considerations at heart.

How traditional architecture and urban design should position themselves to establish their position and their distinction from mainstream architecture and urban design

INTBAU's Traditional Skills Training Workshops are an excellent way to at once highlight the importance of skills training and the need to preserve, whilst also trying to make the case for craftsmanship in new construction. I think that the key roadblock is thinking that 'traditional' only implies conservation work, pastiche constructions, etc. INTBAU needs to encourage new build that can be contemporary in design but with a sense of place and scale, is innately sustainable, uses recycled materials, with traditional wall:window ratios that includes craftsmanship and that takes the time to create beautiful details. This requires that craftsmen and tradespeople be at the forefront working hand in hand with architects and designers.