

The research blueprint: architecture and society

by Urša Komac, PhD, Assistant Professor in Architecture, The University of Canberra

Architecture can be more or less adequately address the needs of individuals for shelter and aesthetics. We also need to acknowledge the public, social, dimensions of architecture. Not only how to best deliver public projects, but also how architecture done for individuals has effects on others. Not only the bystander can be delighted or revolted by your house when they turn the corner, but lots of individual dwellings with lawns, double garages and clothes dryers may have a strong negative impact in the environment if this model is generalised to highly populated developing countries. No matter how ugly or how beautiful these individual dwellings may be.

Further, it needs to be acknowledged that at a macro scale, architecture tends to reflect the values of the society it is embedded into. That is not good or bad. It is how it is. The tirades against the perverse effects of Capitalism in Architecture are intellectually poor, fashionable but ridden with contradiction. Yet they form the most common endeavour of architectural theory. The fact is money, or resources, have been and always be necessary to construct. If *the raison d'être* of architecture is to respond to needs it will therefore respond to the needs of the person, people or institution controlling the resources. It needs to be acknowledged that social reformers of any kind have made, and still make use, of architecture to change the world according to their ideas. Sometimes architects have been given quite a lot of freedom to reflect these ideas. The resulting architecture may well be a good subject of theoretical discussion.

It is, for instance, paradoxical how some expensive and showy projects are praised by the same theorists who criticise the economic system that makes these projects possible. Rather than the maximalist (and muddy) dead end of the so called Critical Theory, and wonder about feminism, minorities and empowerment architectural writers should connect with the more relevant and mainstream political thinking. That is, the disjunctive between Liberalism and Social-Democracy. In other words, how much and which regulations should be put in place so architecture could better achieve its aims to serve the needs of humanity.