

Act local, Think global

Charles Landry invited the speakers to present the key elements of their local experiences to the audience:

- Simon Evans depicted Sheffield as a city of wasted lives, divided between the illiterate and its highly-educated middle-class, with “a kind of disaster-team” trying to develop “the element missing in the picture”: for the creative middle-class to be engaged in the city they live in.
- The second speaker reminded us that everything happens *local*. He also pointed out that you’ll have success by connecting the people who have good ideas. This is not too difficult, unless one tries to possess the process. People do have more creative energy than you would expect. And make the process able to stand on its own and go on without you. Neither put yourself ahead on the media, nor run ahead of the troops.
This intervention echoes the conclusions drawn by P. F. Drucker about the non-profit. *Be the servant of your mission*, would he have said in the same perspective, and *take your role seriously, not yourself seriously*.
- Venkateswar Ramaswamy, from Calcutta, questioned the slogan *act local, think global*. One also needs to think local, since the place is not just an arena for ideas. A relevant claim could therefore be to *think local, act global* (i.e. act everywhere in the world in networks). The abysmal situation of Calcutta was reminded to the audience: a population lacking basic sanitation, with high morbidity, high levels of unemployment, low quality of education, chaotic traffic, local governments in financial crisis and suffering from corruption, a degraded environment, etc. Particularly problematic is the lack of a strong civil society, and the greatest challenge is one of consciousness. Who will represent the city in its diversity?
- Majora Carter, from *Sustainable south-Bronx*, described how the needs of the community in a poor Latino neighborhood meet the values of environmental sustainability, when the multiplication of waste-facilities and power-plants degrades environment and health. Moreover in south-Bronx, there’s hardly any green space and any community open space left. The mission here was to give the locals an opportunity to view their community in a different way, to remember their own history and to claim proactively and constructively what they deserve, a better life, through developing creative projects for the whole region. They were actually able to propose alternative green-policies. Grass-root thinking far ahead.
- Oron Zurit, from Tel Aviv, presented the urban rehabilitation project of *Ayalon Park*: Starting with a mountain of garbage surrounded by varied immigrant populations, working towards the re-appropriation of the place by the inhabitants, to transform it into a park. The challenge being to give the people a sense of belonging.
As the discussion with the public later continued, the excellent example of Porto Alegre in involving people into a participatory process was mentioned.
- Henno Eggenkamp shared his experience in the Bijlmer district of Amsterdam. He claimed that the multicultural Bijlmer festival cannot be sufficient for the local multiethnic population. He evoked his idea to re-use stones from demolished buildings to reconstruct for the community, and an ongoing project involving the exchange of ideas with people and artists in western Africa. For him, one cannot wait for “the politicians” to be proactive, they being “mostly not creative”.

A member of the audience pinpointed the importance of political programmes. Henno Eggenkamp later called for politicians to be more demanding and to reward grass-root action.

In the following discussion, a common concern appeared about the unfortunate refusal of cultural diversity by many: In Rotterdam nowadays, a so-called political solution would be to displace people from different ethnic backgrounds (from the centre to outer suburbs). A consensus was reached on the need to oppose such disastrous policies. We need solidarity to be sustained, keeping both middle-class and ethnic minorities in the city. Majora Carter pointed out that *this is about building communities*. Venkateswar Ramaswamy insisted that squatters and slum-dwellers (in Calcutta) must be given the chance to redevelop the place themselves with the values of *social interests*; but the city is lacking motivation to grasp such an opportunity.

Charles Landry described the case of Nagahama (near Kyoto), a formerly declining city, which has been able to take a long-term global idea and make a local application, a local product from it (in this case, the art of glass-making, meeting a Japanese demand by indigenizing an European tradition).

A member of the audience expressed concerns over the fact that multinational companies are often more effective *locally* than the advocates of Sustainability. He proposed as yet another slogan: *Act locally, Influence globally*. Margaret Shiu Tan, from Taiwan, shared her experience on how to resist to the global corporate culture by introducing the alternative into the museum, attracting international attention and gaining credibility in front of the local government.

Charles Landry claimed that we need to reinvent our social institutions. Most public infrastructures did not change much, since the industrial revolution. Following S. Conger, Landry urges us to wonder about those institutions, their creation, history and potential for change. For Landry, as much as the arts, a social entrepreneurship is needed. One could also join the two and (following Joseph Beuys) call for a development of social sculpture as an imperative dimension of acting local.

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