

[ EVENTS ]

BY Dr VERONICA NG

# GREEN BUILDING FORUM'15

Three speakers examine the meaning of place-making, from a green, sustainable perspective.



FROM TOP LEFT (CLOCKWISE):  
The speakers of GBF –  
Professor John Ng, Marko den  
Breems and Dr Tan Loke Mun

Convened by Ar Alice Leong, the Green Building Forum (GBF) 2015 focused on place-making that is underpinned by the green agenda. The theme was interpreted in a dynamic and diverse manner by three distinguished speakers: Dr Tan Loke Mun, Principal of DTLM Architect and Director of Archicentre Sdn Bhd, Kuala Lumpur; Professor John Ng, Chairman of BEAM Society Limited, Hong Kong; and Marko den Breems, Managing Principal of Jasmx, New Zealand.

Beginning his presentation with an image of the earth, Dr Tan alluded to the global issues of population and posed a fundamental question of 'Where are we now?'. With the witty statement of 'Now everyone can...', Dr Tan continued to frame issues of the thinning of borders between places and rapid urbanisation and densification. Posing yet another question of 'What is tomorrow

like?', he made a strong position that the issues about the future are about sustainability and survival within a borderless world. Dr Tan pointed to the failure of affordable housing and questioned 'Is there a green solution for the 99%, the mass?'. The issues which were framed by a multitude of questions were followed by a presentation of his architectural works ranging from the S11 House to 23 Terrace and Suen Gallery, which offer a narrative of design features such as the 'big' roof, permeable and porous space, water harvesting, roof gardens and second skin. Moving from environmental aspects of sustainability, Dr Tan continued with issues of social sustainability. Drawing the audiences to the book cover of *The Image of the City* by Kevin Lynch, Dr Tan argued that the DNA of place-making lies in the in-between spaces of buildings, illustrated through his masterplanning of Setia City and projects such as SP Setia Headquarters, Setia City Convention Centre and Glad Tidings Church, among others. He argued that in order to sustain a township, elements of business, community and environment should co-exist, through which a place is created.

The enigmatic presentation of Dr Tan was followed by Professor John Ng's talk on 'Green and Place', examining the question of 'What is a liveable environment?'

Drawing from his homeland, Ng presented Hong Kong, a place of dense development very close to the harbour and the neighbourhood, as a case of compact sustainable city. Contrary to the opinion that high density developments and rapid urbanisation pose urban issues, Ng argued that the compact city is beneficial because of the varied amenities and social infrastructure, mixed-use development, efficiency of transport and urban mobility, fine grain of urban morphology of interconnected street networks, walkable and vibrant neighbourhoods, active public realm and a strong sense of community. He drew links between people and place, and defined that "a unique place is identified through integrated approaches to resource management and an optimum relationship between urban design, place-making, land use, transport, air quality ... and health and wellbeing", the latter forming the impetus of green building. Context, connectivity and architecture are three key domains that contribute to the uniqueness of place. Ng continued to illustrate these three domains through buildings rated by BEAM (Hong Kong's version of GBD): the Zero Carbon Building – Eco Home; the Kowloon East office which made use of leftover spaces under the flyover; Kowloon East which relates to place-making of the second CBD of Hong Kong; Holiday Inn Express HK Soho; Merinella; Hang Seng Management

College; OUHK Jubilee College; Kwai Shing Estate; Jockey Club Environmental Building; and Peak Galleria.

The last speaker was Marko den Breems, Managing Principal of Jasmx, a multi-disciplinary office that adopts an integrated approach in urban design, architecture and interior design. The practice focuses on culture, language, land and technology as driving forces of their work. Using a timeline as a narrative of Jasmx's works, den Breems presented five buildings: the AUT Administrative Building (2002), AUT Learning Centre (2004), NZ1 Centre (2007), and most notably, the Jasmx Auckland Office (2009) and Tuhoë Te Uru Taumatua. Jasmx's environmental practices are exemplified in their own office that promotes e-bikes, compost bins in the basement, and work

spaces that can double up as a social and community space when the office is not in use. The recent project of Tuhoë Te Uru Taumatua pushes the boundary of sustainability, i.e. to explore an architecture that does not consume any energy and water, utilises non-toxic materials, and does not produce waste at all stages of construction and maintenance. The building took up the Living Building Challenge, in which the criteria include a building that is beautiful and equitable to the community, has educational opportunity, and has no impacts to the environment. Leading from here, den Breem closed the talk with a preview of a beautiful documentary film titled 'Ever the Land. A People. A Place. Their Building' that narrates a statement and commitment of people to their land and culture.

The moderation session led by Ar Sarly Adre Sarkum opened up a discussion about future global challenges while alluding to the notion of crisis as a powerful driver of change. In particular, it raises the concerns of sufficiency and affordability in Malaysia, and how technology impacts human life and the societal structure. One thing's for sure, 'action' is more important than advocating awareness.

While Dr Tan, Ng and den Breems shared different perspectives on being 'green', all three presentations share one thing in common – they believe that the sensitivity and responsiveness towards environment and place through qualitative means will benefit the people, creating both liveable and meaningful places. Green after all is more than just 'numbers'. ❧



Recipients of the Green Building Index Awards during GBF 2015

