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Batuz
Batuz-Foundation Sachsen
Altzella/Sachsen
D-01683 Nossen
Germany

Dear Batuz:

You ask that I offer my thoughts on the association of universities with the facilities at Altzella -- and thus with one another. I am pleased to do this, but of course this can be no more than a set of projections.

I begin from our current Sachsen/Batuz Foundation/MIT collaboration. This is a year-long urban design project focussed on Dresden. It will involve about twenty students and three or more professors, culminating in design propositions. This will surely be a successful educational program for the students. There are, however, two other goals which touch on the city of Dresden and the Batuz Foundation. Relative to the State of Sachsen and the city of Dresden, it is our intention to identify problems and opportunities, the exploration of which will prove stimulating for our sponsors. Relative to the Batuz Foundation/Société Imaginaire, it should be recognized that the Société brought the MIT/Dresden urban project into existence, but this is only the overt content of our association. The urban project brings a group of outstanding professors and students into association with one another and with their counterparts in Dresden. New, project-based associations are created which, at personal and professional levels, may be anticipated to have continuing influence.

However, taken alone, the MIT/Dresden project does not realize the full potential of the Altzella/Société Imaginaire program. Well-designed and conducted projects, as we intend MIT/Dresden to be, have, by definition, their own boundaries and completeness. It is the ambition of the Société also to engender creative, even serendipitous, encounters across disciplines and among people from different cultures. To this end it is necessary that Altzella be used intensely -- especially that two or more simultaneous projects bring contributive people into relation with one another. At a practical level, it is also only with such a more intense set of activities that the resources of Altzella will be adequately engaged.

What should these additional activities be? In the spirit of serendipitous learning and project construction these activities must, of course, engage as many disciplines as possible: not only architecture, but art, writing, politics, scholarship, and more. Since our visit in Dresden, I have heard Dresdeners speak of the greater importance for Sachsen of ties to its eastern and southern neighbors than to western Germany. So, new initiatives for Altzella should surely include universities and individuals from central and eastern Europe -- Poland and the Czech Republic, in particular. You, Batuz, have special knowledge and valuable relation in South America. You have made the triangulation of North and South America with central Europe a feature of the Société, and so should it be in the selection of universities and individuals conducting work at Altzella.

There is no reason for me to speculate here about the universities or projects to be sought out for the Altzella initiative. One thing is clear -- a high standard must be sustained if such an exciting but exploratory program is to win increasing respect.

The spirit of this letter is not to emphasize further opportunities for MIT or for the discipline of architecture. Still that is what I know best, so I will mention other thoughts that have come to me.

1) MIT has a small but outstanding Visual Arts Program that includes at least two world-renowned artists, Dennis Adams and Krzysztof Wodiczko. Wodiczko, a graduate of the Academy in Warsaw, has retained strong connections in his native country. (It may also be noted that the Academy in Warsaw would be a desirable collaborator in architectural matters.)

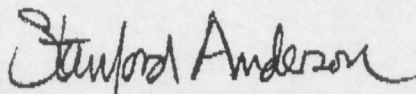
2) We are interested in building stronger connections between civil engineering and art and architecture. Santiago Calatrava of Zurich is an outstanding exemplar of such a cross-fertilization of disciplines. South America and Europe are more successful in this realm than the U.S. We would like to engage others here. At the same time, we do have a young professor who is exploring structural systems that would be appropriate for potential constructions at Alzella: an entrance pavilion; an outdoor café; an outdoor theatre, for example.

3) There are political, economic, even ethical imperatives why we should build with greater responsibility to the environment ("sustainability" is one of the recurrent notions advanced in this field). Jaime Lerner's important architectural and urban sustainability programs in Curitiba, Brazil, deserve to be better known. Green Architecture is even more advanced in Europe than the U.S. (one of the figures I admire here is Prof. Thomas Herzog of Munich). Conducted effectively, sustainability must not neglect the visual and cultural dimensions of such work. But its political and ethical dimensions make it especially appropriate for the full range of Société participants.

I would close with a last word about the Alzella environment. The old monastery and its ruins establish a first sensibility of physical and cultural place. Your early work in transforming some of the lesser buildings of Alzella to your own use showed another, but complementary, sensibility: simplicity of execution, sympathetic continuity with the old construction while creating a new environment. If Alzella is to attract, and then sustain, the participation of creative people, it must have a distinctive, sustaining environment -- not something that feels like an ordinary institution or commercial environment.

I hope these thoughts are of some assistance to you.

With best wishes,



Stanford Anderson
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