

Abstract

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Deciphering the code of 'sustainable' architecture Exploring the discourse of PLEA 2014

Legislative pressures to quantify impacts of design decisions for energy conservation have driven intrinsic transformations in architectural design decision-making. Infiltration of 'sustainability' concepts within the profession, and migration of associated terminologies is hypothesized to have led to a corresponding transformation in the discourse employed by architects and academics. In this study, a discourse analysis of PLEA 2014 conference proceedings was performed, to explore what is meant by the term 'sustainable' architecture. Results reveal that discursive uses of the term 'sustainable' architecture are broadly contested. Associated meanings range from technocratic connotations seemingly synonymous with the term 'energy-efficient,' descriptions of 'sustainable' architecture as an elite class of buildings and characterizations of 'sustainable' as vernacular and holistic, amongst other discursive uses. It is further contended that the status of the word 'sustainable' in the architectural discourse is purposively broad-brushed and wide-ranging, mirroring the range of methods, tools and techniques available at the architect's disposal to fulfil commitment to the 'sustainable' cause. Nevertheless, this non-standardised, pluralist interpretation of 'sustainability' is what allows architects worldwide to create a rich tapestry of architectural heritage that not only responds to, but also weaves together aesthetical, technical, contextual and humanistic considerations.