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What client?

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What client ?

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Urbanization is growing exponentially, global streams of refugees are at an all-time high, 10 million people found their homes destroyed by one typhoon on the Philippines, 2,000,000,000 people have no access to basic sanitation. The building sector produces a gigantic 60% of global waste. 40% of (non-renewable) energy is consumed by buildings (without calculating energy used in construction). Growing amounts of buildings become abandoned and derelict, infrastructural failures and junk spaces surge and whole urban quarters decline socially and physically. Any more challenges needed?

Looking on a global scale, architectural competences are required like never before in history of humanity: Certainly not as decorators, not as entertainers or technocrats but as intellectuals and designers who are willing and capable responding to global spatial challenges. Oddly enough, there is a huge gap between rising pressure for new approaches towards space, urbanization, environmental challenges, technological inventions, transformation of cities and buildings on one hand and the decline in impact, reputation, self-esteem and economy of 'conventional' architectural profession on the other hand. In Asia like elsewhere, more and more building design is done by engineering companies. So what are the perspectives of the architectural profession for the next decades – resp. what could be its impact to human development?

Charles Jencks pointed out about the scale of global challenges that (the architects) *'have the ambition on one level to shape the earth. And yet we do not have either the capacity intellectually, economically, or in terms of power... We have an earth-shaping rhetoric, but a Boy Scout ideology'* (Jencks Charles in interview with C-lab/Columbia University <http://c-lab.columbia.edu/0040.html>)

By investigating various international activities, the paper shows examples how to overcome this paralysing 'Boy-Scout ideology' without switching to the opposite extreme of unproductive phantasies of omnipotence, much like 'architecture or revolution'. It is not new knowledge that in history architecture rarely has been a popular art and that the clients were the rich and powerful, documented by a legacy of palaces, churches, villas, office blocs and alienated 'property developments'. Slum dwellers, climate victims, war refugees, the urban poor but also endangered species as well as tormented spaces cannot engage architects, no matter how urgent the problems are. It is the architects who must reverse their understanding of 'clients', for the sake of these challenges as well as for their own professional future.

This started happen very much in contrast to predominant architectural education models: Young, versatile and inspiring 'alternative practices' are emerging. Their common approach is to address and investigate substantial problems of space which initially have no client. In this way, they extend the methods of traditional architectural practice and create a new relationship between the design processes and the users, very frequently including a tendency for interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and cross disciplinary approaches. Some of these practices work as 'guerrillas', while others have established 'spatial agencies'. Their outcomes are not only relevant and fresh design solutions but they are most notably creative in generating new forms of financing/enabling public projects as well as getting rewarded their own efforts. It is an ambition of the paper to document common grounds from their different experiences and to make them productive for our educational institutions.