



ENTREVISTA / INTERVIEW

Emmanuel Carter

/ Profesor Asociado del Departamento de Arquitectura del Paisaje, de la ESF (College of Environmental Science and Forestry). Estudió arquitectura en la Universidad de Cornell, donde también realizó un Magíster de Planificación Regional. Ha trabajado en el área de planificación y diseño urbano en varias oficinas, donde ha realizado planes maestros, diseño de parques, y revitalización urbana. / [Commonwealth Department of Landscape Architecture, ESF \(College of Environmental Science and Forestry\) Professor. He studied architecture at Cornell University, where he also completed a Masters of Regional Planning. He has worked in the area of urban planning and design in various offices, where he has conducted master planning, park design and urban revitalization.](#)

In the last decades, the term Urban Sustainability has become a global trend, both amongst politicians and within the various disciplines that study the city.

What is your opinion on that? I think we (professionals, politicians, academics) frame the concept of “sustainability” in unfortunate ways. One way is to quote or paraphrase the Bruntland Report which suggested that : “Sustainable development is the kind of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” With this framework we too often don’t think rigorously about our present range of “needs” or about those of future generations. Another way is to relegate “sustainability” to efforts that address only

Antonio Zumelzu

Arquitecto, Universidad Austral de Chile, Chile. PhD(c) in Urban Design and Planning, Eindhoven University of Technology, Holanda. Académico Instituto de Arquitectura y Urbanismo, Facultad de Arquitectura y Artes, Universidad Austral de Chile, Chile. antonio.zumelzu@uach.cl

Dr. Juan José Sarralde

Arquitecto, Universidad Austral de Chile, Chile. PhD in Architecture, MPhil in Environmental Design in Architecture, University of Cambridge, Inglaterra. Académico Instituto de Arquitectura y Urbanismo, Facultad de Arquitectura y Artes, Universidad Austral de Chile, Chile. jjssaralde@gmail.com

ecosystems and the delivery of ecosystem services. Yet another way is to be satisfied with efforts aimed at short-term, small-scale repairs of local ecosystems. These frameworks are insufficient for the scale of the problems that contemporary urbanism needs to address. “Sustainable” urbanism is about managing the evolution of viable human settlements within the context of retaining a viable biosphere to support life in its many and varied forms. That means that “sustainable” urbanism is local and global, ecological and social. With that in mind, let me offer a working (and evolving) definition of “sustainable human settlements” which, of course, should be the goal of sustainable urbanism.

Image 1. Contemplation house in a wetland near the community gardens in the greenbelt of Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain (source: the author).



Sustainable human settlements are those that manage the evolution of community and place within: (1) the renewable productive limits of local, regional, national, and global natural and human resources and processes, and; (2) the context of rigorously maintained social equity and social justice. This assumes human understanding of renewable productive limits, social equity and social justice; a willingness to rigorously hold to constantly measurable economic, social, environmental, and aesthetic standards that are within those limits, and; a willingness to embed those limits and standards into the legal, spiritual, material and emotional fabric of our culture(s) in such a way that sustainable practices move from experiment to law, from law to habit, from habit to conventional wisdom and from conventional wisdom to fundamental and signature cultural practices. The result should be a constantly evolving symbiotic relationship between life-affirming humans and the biosphere's natural resources and processes – one that allows for mutually beneficial opportunities with regard to functionality, efficiency, diversity, uniqueness, resiliency and equilibrium, characteristics which in varying degrees, at any given time, define the activity and condition of a healthy, shifting, steady-state ecological and urban mosaic (Carter, 2013).

I would like to suggest that it is within the above framework that contemporary and future urbanists must address comprehensive planning, the development of catalytic projects that generate and sustain life in eco-urban communities, and the design strategies and tactics that articulate the detailed elements, systems and interactive processes within which all living things thrive. This approach to sustainable urbanism would require political courage, informed populations and interdisciplinary professionals and it would stimulate the human spirit, encourage the citizenship and stewardship that would repair, maintain and eventually enhance our



Image 2. Urban senda (representing an effort to serve pedestrians and cyclists better than cars) in a neighborhood near the core of Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain

ecosystems and produce communities that are practical, meaningful and beautiful.

Based on your academic and professional experience in the United States, what do you see as the main challenges of today's cities in terms of the integration between built and natural landscapes?

American practitioners and academics already have the skills and the philosophical, theoretical and technical frameworks that are necessary for integrating built and natural landscapes in our metropolitan and rural jurisdictions but here are five issues (among many others) that challenge the practice of American urbanism. They are: (1) our constitutional emphasis on the primacy of private property rights; (2) the lack of environmental literacy among the citizenry; (3) the lack of design literacy among the citizenry; (4) the difficulty of fostering interdisciplinary

practice, and; (5) the disjuncture between the theory, philosophy and principles of environmentalism and design as addressed in our universities and the nature of professional practice in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. Let's look at each of these challenges.

Private Property Rights. In American urbanism, private property rights are more important than the public sector's obligation to address the greater good for the great number of citizens. The result is that private property owners and private developers have much latitude in using their properties to generate economic activity. Municipal planning departments must work hard to build community consensus on the establishment of innovative and effective guidelines for urban design and environmental protection. Given this private property emphasis and our frontier-driven,



Image 3. Park set in the core of Ottawa, Canada (source: the author).

century-long love affair with suburban sprawl, we have become almost suspicious of the concept of "city".

A Lack of Environmental Literacy. Our emphasis on private property rights and sprawl is abetted by a nation-wide lack of environmental literacy among citizens. In our frontier history, nature was something to be conquered and mastered – a dangerous place to be tamed and made into a commodity. It was not considered a nurturing environment in which humans and nature were to have a symbiotic relationship. Neither our education system nor our politics emphasize the kind of environmental literacy that would allow an informed citizenry to make good choices in voting on environmental issues or in supporting good environmental planning and design. Environmental conservation and environmental enhancement require a public that understands the how ecosystems function and why the health of such systems matters.

A Lack of Design Literacy. The average American is not design literate and collectively we do not love good design (too often we think big is good) nor do we demand good design from either the public or private sector. Design programs in American universities are only beginning to reject the idea that design is a closed world that cannot be understood by the

average citizen. Hence design literature is not generally available to the public and designers have layers of professional jargon that shroud design practices in mystery.

The Difficulty in Fostering Interdisciplinary Professional Education and Professional Practice. Too few designers are trained to work with professionals in the realms of ecology, sociology, psychology, law, finance, or even with other design professionals in related disciplines. Little by little this is changing as more university design programs use real clients in their studio and workshop classes and include in those classes (as participants on the design teams) students from other disciplines. Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain is an exquisite city because the on-going evolution of the city is managed by teams of urbanists, engineers, architects, landscape architects, ecologists, botanists, foresters, wildlife biologists, (in consultation with people from many other disciplines, especially in the social sciences) who work together to make the present better and the future desirable. The city's elected and appointed officials, and the professionals who work with them understand that good urban design, good environmentalism and social equity all go together in the "good" city.

Disjuncture Between Design Education and Design Practice. I was recently on my way to a meeting with several design and

environmental professionals in Santiago, Chile. Sharing the same car, we began talking about why it is that, given the intensity of our professional training, we as professionals and academics cannot seem to change the rapacious ways that the global corporate organizations and so many governments treat ecosystems and human settlements. We decided that the relative insignificance of designers and environmentalists is due to the fact that we are practitioners for hire and writers of journal articles and not the owners of land, money and political clout. In the world of practice politicians, lawyers and financiers are the purveyors of power. Designers and environmentalists must learn to effectively work with them – and with citizens! Every time we touch a project we have a teaching moment. Every built product is a cultural conversation. Practitioners need to build better projects (and especially learn how to build better with less money). Academics need to practice more and write less (but not teach less!!!) In the United States we need to move toward regulatory approaches that are about the greater good for the greater number and for the greater area of concern. We need to build capacity for environmental and design literacy among our powerful decision-makers and every



Image 4*. Aerial view of a neighborhood in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain (source: the author).

one of our citizens. We need to foster interdisciplinary practice and we need to emphasize, as much as possible, university education that exposes students to real clients in their studios, field work, workshops and internships. We need to understand that the communities (of any scale) are complex systems and that designers need collaborators in order to make the best decisions and the best recommendations. These are the challenges that American urbanism must address – and soon!

Where does your interest in teaching foreign students, particularly in Spanish speaking countries, come from? What differences or similarities do you see in the teaching of urban design in the US and these other countries?

Throughout high school and for one year at university (academic year 1965/66) I took classes in Spanish. The classes introduced me not only to the structure of the language but also to Spanish and Latin American history and culture. I found these to be fascinating. I finished my graduate course work in 1974 (and eventually my thesis in 1978). From 1974 until 1985 I worked in planning and design offices – the Ithaca Department of Planning & Development (Ithaca, New York), the Pennsylvania Bureau of Recreation and

Conservation (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), Chase Architectural Associates (Syracuse, New York), and the Syracuse Department of Planning & Development (Syracuse, New York). In 1985 I took a position in the Department of Landscape Architecture at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science & Forestry (SUNY-ESF).

The Department of Landscape Architecture has a Master of Landscape Architecture program and a Master of Science program.

It also has a 5-year Bachelor of Landscape Architecture program (BLA). In the fall semester of the fifth year of study, the BLA students are required to spend a semester abroad. Groups of four students can go to any country in the world and each group has an academic advisor. Each advisor visits the students after they have been on location for five weeks. The advisor visit lasts for 1-2 weeks. After two groups in Italy (Florence) and one in Germany (Munich), I had a group in Barcelona. In preparing to visit my students, I began to revive my involvement with the Spanish language. Since 1990 I have had many student groups in Spain (Barcelona, Granada, Sevilla, Vitoria-Gasteiz) and Chile (Santiago, Valparaiso, Frutillar). In 1992-93 I met Drs. Rafael Escribanao and Maria Paz Aramburu (Forest Engineering, Polytechnic University of Madrid) who spent their sabbatical year at SUNY-ESF. They were friends with Professor Manuel Rodriguez (Faculty of Forest Sciences at the University of Chile). After that I began to give guest lectures (in very slow Spanish)



Image 5. Abandoned border of the Calle-Calle River, facing Valdivia city's downtown, Chile (Photo by: Elisa Cordero, 2010).

* All of the conditions of images 1 to 4, are the result of urban design as applied ecology, the kind of urban design aimed at delivering ecosystem services that: (1) reduce heating and cooling costs by 5%-10% per building; (2) improve public health (objective) and public well-being (subjective); (3) improve property values and the desirability of neighborhoods; (4) absorb particulates from the air, enrich urban soil, and capture and clean storm water; (5) increase biodiversity, and; (6) improve urban aesthetics.

at the Polytechnic University of Madrid whenever I was in Spain.

In 1999, two of my graduate students from Argentina did thesis research at the Center for Environmental Studies (CEA) in Vitoria-Gasteiz. There I met Dr. Luis Orive, the head of CEA. Since that time we have worked together on conference presentations (in somewhat better Spanish), design studios, and the mentoring of undergraduate and graduate students.

In 2002, Professor Manuel Rodriguez returned to SUNY-ESF looking for collaborative opportunities in environmental design and planning. Since that time I have been working with him, his colleagues and his students in the classroom and in professional projects in Santiago and Frutillar.

In 1998, I met Laura Rodriguez at SUNY-ESF. I was her mentor in her graduate studies in urban planning. She is now Dra. Laura



Rodriguez and I am now (and I hope for years to come) developing a relationship with the Faculty of Architecture & Urbanism at the Universidad Austral de Chile! It has all been about contacts, friendships and mutual interests. In short, I have developed a love of Spanish and Latin American cultures (and a slow working knowledge of Spanish) largely because I have been fortunate enough to work with wonderful people in wonderful places!

After your experience of visiting Valdivia (Chile) in 2013 for the Taller Sur conference organised by Universidad Austral de Chile; how would you imagine Valdivia in 2050?

In November 2013 I made only my second visit to Valdivia. In my first visit, I came with my wife and Professor

Manuel Rodriguez (University of Chile).

We came as tourists and we were heading to Chiloé. We did some walking and some driving in the city and then we took the boat tour out to the Bay of Corral. There is much about Valdivia that I do not know.

I am aware of the great earthquake of 1960 and I am also aware that the rivers and the forested landscape make Valdivia's location one of the most beautiful in the world. The beautiful location contrasts sharply with the designed urban landscape. A large number of buildings, streetscapes and public spaces in the urban core seem to result from an absence of financial and emotional investment, a lack of urban design guidelines and a lack of community pride in the visual quality of the city. Valdivia needs better planning and design. The planning department needs to emphasize the need for good design, better use of materials, and guidelines that result in pleasantly





Image 7. "Costanera de los pobres" (The Promenade of the Poor) is the name of this neglected road that borders a belt of beautiful wetlands in the city of Valdivia, Chile (Photo by: Elisa Cordero, 2010).

coherent urban landscapes. This is all the more important in the face of relatively little capital available for investment in renovation and new construction projects. There is also a relative absence of street trees. Given the city's location in the region of Los Rios, a region defined by rivers and forests, Valdivia should be an urban forest garden with appropriately-scaled trees on every street and with much more public space beside the rivers and/or with views to the rivers. This would offer to the citizenry the kind of sense of place that engenders a sense of stewardship of both natural and built resources. There is ample room for urban expansion north across the River Calle Calle and south toward the River Angachilla. A carefully crafted master plan created by talented professionals and

an involved citizenry could result in a city that truly reflects reciprocity between the urban settlement and the host ecosystems. Such a beautiful city would attract an increase in local and outside investment and the growth of tourism. A good place to begin would be to have the Institute for Architecture and Urbanism and the city's Planning Department jointly sponsor design competitions that would result in a vision for the next 50 years and suggest the policies that would be needed to implement that vision. ▲▲

Image 8. Urban proposal to improve areas of water and wetlands, green areas, short roads and official and alternative creative zones in the city of Valdivia, Chile. Study performed by students of the School of Architecture, Universidad Austral de Chile, in 2010 (Source: Files of the Institute of Architecture and Urbanism, Universidad Austral de Chile).

