

Healthy by Nature

OPENING REMARKS

Celebrating Parks and People

Tuesday, September 20, 2011

Cornelia Hahn Oberlander OC FCSLA FASLA

The Roman poet Juvenal who lived in the early 2nd century AD coined the words:
Mens sana in corpore sano– a sound mind in a healthy body

Since the beginning of time, open urban spaces in cities, and the health of the inhabitants have been of great concern to city planners, architects, civic-minded politicians and physicians. In my library I came across a folder 1979 exhibition on Urban Open Spaces at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York, which raised awareness to the importance of parks, plazas for strolling and relaxing, for playgrounds and for well-treed streets, bikeways, waterfronts and rooftops.

Copious writing and thought over the last decade have shown how important it is to be close to nature in our densely populated urban areas. For example, Rene Dubos the eminent scientist, who coined the words, *Think Globally, Act Locally*, wrote in 1968 “From great estate to municipal park, from slow-paced country road to multilane parkway, from city playground to national recreation area, from village to city, from suburb to satellite community, and from one-room schools to complex educational system, the environment endlessly evolves in response to changing human needs and dreams. The concept of an optimum environment is unrealistic because it implies a static human life. Planning for the future demands an ecological attitude based on the assumption that man will continuously bring about evolutionary changes through the creative potentialities inherent in his biological nature.”

Forty years have passed since this book was published. Today we are faced with unprecedented urban growth where open urban spaces become less and less available. Therefore we must analyze our cities and towns as to their liveable potential for recreation on all levels and providing nature for a stress relieving experience.

E.O.Wilson, the well-known scientist who coined the word “biophilia” said “The longing for nature is built into our genes”, He wrote: *Nature holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive and even spiritual*

satisfaction. This quote directs us to make nature accessible to all ages. If we want a healthy planet with healthy children we must start to design with nature in all our environments. And we must direct parents and teachers to show the young the wonders of being out-of-doors away from never-ending technological inventions, such as iPods and TVs.

The question before us is, how do we achieve our goals of a green city for healthy people, commensurate with the environmental goals of sustainability?

There are movements afoot to show comprehensive landscape guidelines for the 21st century, addressing our needs: clean air, stormwater management and reduction of urban heat island effects by providing ecologically sensitive planting and wildlife habitats. In order to move forward we need a vision for useable open urban space planning at all levels of government. Only then can we can proudly say: look what our elected officials have done for us with citizen participation.

RESOURCES

BRUNDTLAND, et al. *Our Common Future*, Brundtland Report. Oxford Press, 1987.

CHILDREN'S CREATIVE CENTRE, EXPO 67, MONTREAL – Google for a variety of information.

CREASY, Roselind. *Edible Landscaping: Now You Can Have Your Gorgeous Garden and Eat It Too*. Sierra Club Books. San Francisco. 2010.

KELLERT, Stephen R. and Edward O. Wilson, Editors. *The Biophilia Hypothesis*. Island Press, Washington, D.C. 1993

KELLERT, Stephen R., Judith H. Heerwagen, Martin L. Mador. *Biophilic Design: The Theory, Science, and Practice of Bringing Buildings to Life*. John Wiley & Sons, New York. 2008.

KOLBERT, Elizabeth. *The Climate of Man (3 Parts)* *The New Yorker*. April 25, May 2, May 9, 2005.

LOUV, Richard. *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. Chapel Hill, N.C. 2008.

McHARG, Ian. *Design with Nature*. The Natural History Press. Garden City, New York, NY. 1995.

ORR, David W. *Earth in Mind*. Island Press, Washington, D.C. 1994.

SOLER, Ivette. *Edible Front Yard: The Mow-Less, Grow-More Plan for a Beautiful, Bountiful Garden* Timber Press. Portland, Oregon 2011.

SUZUKI, David and David R. Boyd. *David Suzuki's Green Guide*. Greystone Books. Vancouver. 2008.

TAYLOR, Lisa. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, The Smithsonian Institution's Nation Museum of Design: *Immovable Objects: Urban Open Spaces*. 1979. Library of Congress No. 79-52465

World Urban Forum. www.unhabitat.org/wuf/2006, www.unhabitat.org/wuf/2008

The Living Building Challenge <http://ilbi.org/the-standard/lbc-v1.3.pdf>

www.corneliaoberlander.ca