Editorial

"What we say publicly matters because it is the ground on which change is built, in tiny increments as well as giant leaps." That's one of the quotes of Lesley Lokko, the Ghanaian-Scottish architect, academic, and novelist, curator of the 18th Venice Architecture Biennial, in one of her recent interviews presenting this year's edition. We like to recall it because it describes the Vitruvius journal's choral effort to contribute to change towards building sustainability by divulgation of scientific research on topics that focus attention on research trajectories of greatest interest in current times. The theme of this issue is the so-called social housing that aims to concretely help an increasingly large segment of the low-income population due to the sharp social and economic disparities in contemporary societies. This is a type of ambitious housing and urban intervention which aims to solve the housing emergency and provide access to energy-efficient housing to those who cannot afford a market-rate home through renting or purchasing at subsidized prices. As part of this *ad hoc* projects, research and social innovation are set as a fundamental goal. In fact, social housing aims to create conditions so that there can be fruitful integration of citizens with the neighborhood, including through the enjoyment of shared open spaces. From this point of view there is a certain difference with public housing understood in the traditional sense, because the focus is always on develop a good integration that can lead the community itself to be enriched, enjoying both individual and group benefits. These are multidisciplinary projects that place the sustainability of building and living at the forefront and require a new approach and new visions at the urban and building scales.

Huge amounts of new building materials will be needed in the coming decades to make up the housing deficit in developing countries, as well as to build new infrastructure, much of which consists of carbon-intensive materials such as cement, steel, and aluminum. In Europe, on the other hand the renovation of the building stock is one of the priority areas for action in the Green Deal. The energy efficiency of existing buildings must be increased by 75 percent by 2030, and the renovation rate must reach the value of at least 4 percent. Materials for energy retrofits, regulatory adaptations, and refurbishments will be needed in the coming years. If conventional fossil-based materials are used, the balance of climate-altering gas emissions will be high, and the goal of carbon neutrality will not be achieved. For all these reasons, it is necessary to turn these challenges into opportunities.

The building of the future can be designed to reduce emissions or even store CO_2 if based on careful selection of building materials and technologies.

We can also design buildings as repositories of materials to be reused in the future opening new scenarios of urban mining and serve the function of reactivating the economic system and rebalancing social disparities.

Open challenges confront us with the need and opportunity to transform the construction industry from one of the most environmentally impactful sectors into a powerful agent of change.

If we think about what social housing projects have been so far, we will most likely find ourselves in an urban context in which none of us would want to live. Neighborhoods of anonymous and unlivable houses with constructions surreptitiously inspired by the principle of *utilitas* in which, as many say, public intervention has done what it could do with the available budget. And it is precisely on this issue that the disconnect between saying and doing appears in its disruptive concreteness with the realization of the failure of policies and principles against social inequity. If we analyzed each case with the logic of rampant thinking, the answer to what our eyes do not want to see is *utilitas*. But that is not what we are used to doing. Let us instead question the meaning given to the word *utilitas* in this case. The function is to give a home to those who do not have one. But what is the function of a home? Who are the inhabitants of this house? How many people will live in this house? What are their needs? What part of the world are we in? These are obvious questions from which we cannot escape. And if we try to answer them, the answers are not as obvious as the questions. The variety of facets of humanity appears. Perhaps we are thinking too much. Action is needed. It is the emergency that must guide

our doing. There is always an emergency. Emergency and change are the most common words in today's lexicon. So, we choose the path already taken by others. It is better not to make changes. We simplify and standardize and design and build with *utilitas* understood in its most sinister meaning of profit for the few. And in this way, we miss another opportunity for change. Instead, we need to dare, experiment, and innovate. And that is exactly what we do in the world of scientific research daily.

Every architectural project is an experimentation from which to learn, to understand the limits of even the currently available materials and technologies, and to open new visions and horizons of experimentation for the buildings of the future.

Returning to the initial question for whom the house is we need to build, perhaps the answer that will best guide us in designing is the house is for those who have not yet been born. Crazy answer. We are willing to take the criticism of rampant thinking and take responsibility for our actions. It is a child yet to be born that will make the difficulty of design choice dissolve and the hypocrisy of the mask of complexity behind which intolerable immobility in professional practice is hidden in many cases.

Quoting Paolo Portoghesi, who passed away recently, there is a need to move toward an architecture of responsibility, a humanistic architecture that adheres to basic criteria of learning from nature and history, engaging in innovation, protecting natural balances, and contributing to the reduction of consumption.

It is knowledge that will guide our hand, from the first sketch we will make barefoot in the ground where that housing complex is to be built imagining the child who will be born half a century from now and who will not live in that house, but who like the child of today will have to have the opportunity to have a home. And that is up to us. As master Zvi Hecker says in the interview that opens this issue, "Sketches, sometimes clumsy sometimes very precise, are necessary steps in the slow process of discovering the non-existent. The archaeologist searches for the remains of an extinct culture by removing layers of garbage, so the architect scrambles to peel off useless leaves and peek at an unseen but exotic fruit, hoping to discover its shape and flavor".

Drawing by hand is a process of discovery and highlights possibilities that the designer's creative imagination is not always able to consciously grasp. Likely, it will not be the first sketch that will be our design idea, but it will be the start of a creative process that will lead to social housing in which we will not need to confine unlivable neighborhoods for low-coming people. And it will be Paolo Portoghesi's architecture of responsibility that will guide the uncertain hand of our first sketch together with scientific research that will offer us new possibilities for symbiotic dialogue with the natural context where we build with building inspired not only by the principle of *utilitas* and *firmitas*, but also by that of *venustas* because building is an art form.

On behalf of all those who contribute to the editorial staff of the journal, we express our thanks to Paola Ardizzola for her interview with architect Zvi Hecker and to all the authors for being willing to share their research and visions on social housing.

To our readers, our sincerest wish for a journey, in small or big steps does not matter, toward an ever better future.

Graziella Bernardo