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Istanbul UIA Congress 2005 – Mandilee Newton/TTIA Report

The recently concluded ABEL Bestcrete Architectural Design & Excellence Awards had an open prize - an all-expenses paid trip to Istanbul, Turkey, for the World Congress of the International Union of Architects - supplied by the sponsors. The prize was won by acla:works who nominated Mandilee Newton, an associate of acla:works architects + urban planners to represent acla:works. Mrs. Newtown also represented the TTIA during the World Congress.

Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago (TTIA) August 25, 2005 -- The UIA (International Union of Architects) Congress took place between July 4 – 7 and this is a brief account of the visit to Istanbul by Mandilee Newton, an associate of acla:works architects + urban planners.

The Congress

The International Union of Architects hosts a triennial congress of architecture in different member cities around the world. The Congress in Istanbul was the twenty-second of its kind, developed around the theme Cities: Grand Bazaar of ArchitectureS. The theme was meant to encapsulate the emergent ideas of pluralism and freedom of expression, to reflect and stimulate an awareness of the multiculturalism of cities and architecture around the world.

The Congress provided a great opportunity to meet and interact with architects from all over the world. While there, I met architects from Turkey, Malaysia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Mauritania, Greece, Iran, Brazil and Curacao, to mention a few.

Each day at the Congress consisted of a combination of Keynote Speeches, Workshops and Parallel Events & Exhibitions. The keynote speakers included great architects such as Tadao Ando, Glenn Murcutt, Zaha Hadid and Charles Correa, the renowned Indian architect that visited Trinidad in 1999.

The speakers presented their works and their concepts with an emphasis on the meaning and responsibility of architecture. For example, Glenn Murcutt, from Australia, spoke about a building's ability to respond to climate. He expressed that in the same way humans add and remove layers of clothing to react to their environment; buildings should be able to do the same.

Charles Correa spoke about the city, and the social phenomenon of the expanding city. He stressed that the goal is not just to house the inhabitants, but to create jobs for them. He expressed that we should not fear expanding cities, because this is the nature of life and the promise of culture.

In between the keynote speeches, workshops were held. These covered topics such as "A Harbour City Where Inhabitants are Isolated from the Sea"; and "Rescuing our Architectural Heritage Through Education".

The parallel events and exhibitions were ongoing displays of multimedia shows, art, photography and architecture exhibitions, and trade shows.

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The setting was that of an interactive campus referred to as the Congress Valley. While walking between lectures and workshops, one could view different exhibits in the gardens, courtyards and temporary booths all around the Valley.

Turkey

Turkey is the bridge between Asia and Europe, and is one of the great cradles of civilization. It was home to the Romans, Byzantines and Ottomans at different periods throughout history. Today, Turkey is inhabited by over sixty million people, ten million of which occupy Istanbul. The majority of the population is Muslim. However, the Turkish Republic is a secular state and religion does not hold the same political significance as in other Muslim countries. For this reason, it is a very liberal place. Istanbul, in particular, is an extremely westernised city.

Istanbul lies at the southern end of the Bosphorus strait which divides Turkey into the European side (to the west) and the Asian side (to the east).

The city is a fusion of the old and the new, the traditional and the contemporary. One of its most majestic monuments is the Hagia Sophia (Aya Sofia). At more than 1,400 years old, it is described as one of the world's most significant architectural achievements with its massive central dome of 31 metres in diameter, second only to the Pantheon's.

In contrast to the rich architectural heritage of the Byzantine and Ottoman periods, Istanbul is also highly modern. For example, in the vicinity of the Congress Valley, the area of Beyoğlu has an intriguing juxtaposition of historic buildings, monuments, mosques, churches, a tram system, a subway system (the Tünel) and the contemporary commercial.

Historically home to the immigrant community of Istanbul, Beyoğlu is a district that never sleeps. There are many alleys off of the main street, Istiklal Caddesi, which house cafés, jazz bars and shops that remain open for most of the night. Because the street is pedestrianised, there is an almost 24-hour continuous flow of people, to the scale of Carnival Tuesday in Trinidad.

Another aspect of Istanbul is its vibrant trading culture, inherent in a city straddling the European and Asian continents. There is a trading district which contains bazaars, hans (storage depots) and shops. The two main bazaars are the Spice Bazaar, c. 1660 and the Grand Bazaar, c. 1453. Both are a warren of narrow streets covered by vaulted roofs, which contain numerous booths, much like our flea markets in Trinidad.

The Spice Bazaar trades in the many spices, seeds, nuts and Turkish delights (homemade sweets, not dissimilar to our local confectionery.)

The Grand Bazaar offers a limitless array of goods, from silk rugs to fridge magnets. Inside both bazaars one will encounter relentless invitations to buy and excessive haggling.

The experience of the UIA Congress in Istanbul was an intensely enriching one; the experience of the city itself equaling the knowledge gained from the Congress.

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Hagia Sophia as seen from across the Golden Horn waterway; The Golden Horn is a flooded river valley that flows southwest into the Bosphorus and is considered to be the world's greatest natural Harbour.



Modern Istanbul; a view down Tarlabası Caddesi (Tarlabaşı Street), one of the streets in Beyoğlu.

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A side street of the Istiklal Caddesi, which houses sidewalk cafés that remain open for most of the night.



Inside the Spice Bazaar; this market was established in 1660 as part of the New Mosque complex. At one time, it specialised in spices from the Orient, being that Istanbul was on the trade route between the East and Europe.

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Mandilee Newton at the Istanbul Modern Museum; Nusretiye Mosque in the background.

Mandilee Newton is an Associate of acla:works. She is a Registered Architect and a Member of the Trinidad & Tobago Institute of Architects.

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