

Innovation = Transformation

“Innovate”, “reinvent”, “renew”. The use of infinitives is nothing to go by. These days innovation is an injunction. Any project must be a forerunner – first positive energy offices, first all CLT timber tower, first 3D printed house, etc. Patents and standards that govern the implementation of these innovations multiply just as quickly and tend to reduce them to objects doomed to obsolescence, or at least to paper intentions. With the advent of smart cities, innovation is closer to a hypertechnological energy performance race than a real vision of “the city of the future”. Yet, beyond this performative architecture – I innovate, therefore I am innovative – there are some architectural innovations that are less likely to receive media coverage, have Instagram shots take of them, or be the subject of 140 characters, because they have a long-term vision, rooted in the past, and aim to redefine the future. “Innovation is an influential process that leads to social change and whose effect is the rejection of existing social standards with a view to offering new ones”, says the Larousse dictionary. This influential process is still at work in the architectural field, whatever more pessimistic people might think. It produces buildings that sometimes share an organic skin with more photogenic ones, but which are the result of a societal approach. BIM (Building Information Modeling), 3D printing, structural timber, and “calls for innovative projects” are just some of the directions of the architecture that will completely change today’s social standards. Updating vernacular know-how is another, as is the use of local resources and cultures, together with participative approaches. Because they are inspired by the past, these initiatives are often judged more decreasing than innovative. What we forget is that they proceed by transformation, constantly in contact with reality. The architect is much more of a director in reality and less of a demiurge. Should we regret this?

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