Designing selflessly with people for people

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Hailing from the small islands of the Bahamas, I never would have imagined sitting around the table with student designers from Spain and Columbia to come to a common design alternative to our selected theme, *Informality: Dharavi, Mumbai*.

If our language barriers weren’t enough, our cultural backgrounds coupled with our different personalities made for a challenging but rewarding group experience. Our differences brought richness to the design, bringing about an unbiased and fluid idea that had the potential of being manifested not only in Mumbai, but possibly in our respective countries and by extension, around the Commonwealth and the world.

Challenging the popular misconceived view of the informal as deprived communities or “slums”, my group and I were able to provide design alternatives that shed light on the advantages of such informal communities and the role they play in sustaining their community and country-at-large.

One particular lecture which we managed to contest our way to seeing (given its conflict with the Charrette’s scheduling time!) proved beyond beneficial. It was a lecture by speakers Jo Noero followed by Alfredo Brillembourg and Hubert Klumpner. Their presentations seemed to have demonstrated in the most colourful and simple fashion, creative ways to address the RIBA's theme for this year's International Week, the *New Urban Agenda*. More pertinent was their ability to smartly address, through speech and design, the notion of the “informal”. Because of the relevance that the presenters’ presentations brought to the Charrette discussions, it would have been a major missed opportunity had we not pushed to attend that particular lecture.

Nevertheless, the mission of RIBA in spreading the message of, the *New Urban Agenda* never became lost and their aim to bring students - and future practitioners - from around the world to share in tackling the *New Urban Agenda* was admirable. We became like bees converging to one nesting ground, RIBA, where we received the ‘nectar’ of informative views on the *New Urban
Agenda which we then discussed and dissected for ourselves before pollinating our various ‘habitats’ and countries.

While the idea of the New Urban Agenda was complicated at first – being entangled in the scholarly opinions and debates of RIBA’s speakers, I came to one simplified conclusion, that the New Urban Agenda was nothing new at all. Instead, it was a simple reminder to architects and designers around the world not to negate the world’s majority but to think and design selflessly with people for people.

Our roles as future designers and architects became more important now if not so before. I was particularly excited to share my experience with my Caribbean School of Architecture design friends and colleagues, resulting in a group of us now in the last weeks of our final year, agreeing to establish a design company guided by a common purpose - to facilitate the advancement of our communities in the Caribbean.

We are as the saying goes, the future, and if we as young designers can become wired to think with a like mind to design and create for the advancement of the world’s bigger half instead of the rich few, the world’s complexion can change for the better.