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REGION III: THE AMERICAS
NORTH AMERICAN REPORT
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PREFACE

This report is comprised of two sections. The first will analyse the general situation of the architectural profession in North America. The second will offer a synthesis of the problems revealed, examine their context and submit some recommendations aimed at solutions. Together with the reporter general of this congress, I have chosen castillian spanish for the oral expression of this report. The choice has been made for atavistic reasons of course, but also because spanish is the second most spoken language in North America. Apart from the spanish and english texts there are also french and arab translations. In all versions, graphics are in english.

THE NORTH AMERICAN ARCHITECT'S SITUATION

A few weeks ago, the American census published a series of figures on the architect's situation in 1980. These figures furnish us the appropriate materials for sketching out the evolution of the architectural profession, not only in the United States but also in all probability in the whole of the North American continent.

In effect, on the one hand the figures available for Canada reproduce, more or less, the same situation as our powerful neighbour albeit at one tenth scale. On the other hand, it appears that equivalent figures are not available at the present time for Mexico.

Before venturing into analysis of the situation of the North American profession, I would like to recall the general theory of the economic activity of architects. Effectively, without such a theory, my considerations may appear subjective or arbitrary.

I developed the said theory in a report published by the IUA and Unesco towards the end of 1979; the report by the way, may be consulted or bought during this congress in the IUA Secretary General's exhibit.

The theory holds that the activity of the architectural profession is a function of the building construction, and in turn it is also a function of the level of built environment desired by the society. This level is a function, in turn, of demographic and economic variables. The

chain of variables, linked by appropriate functions, is represented in the following diagram. On the left are the variables and on the right the nature of the functions may be read.

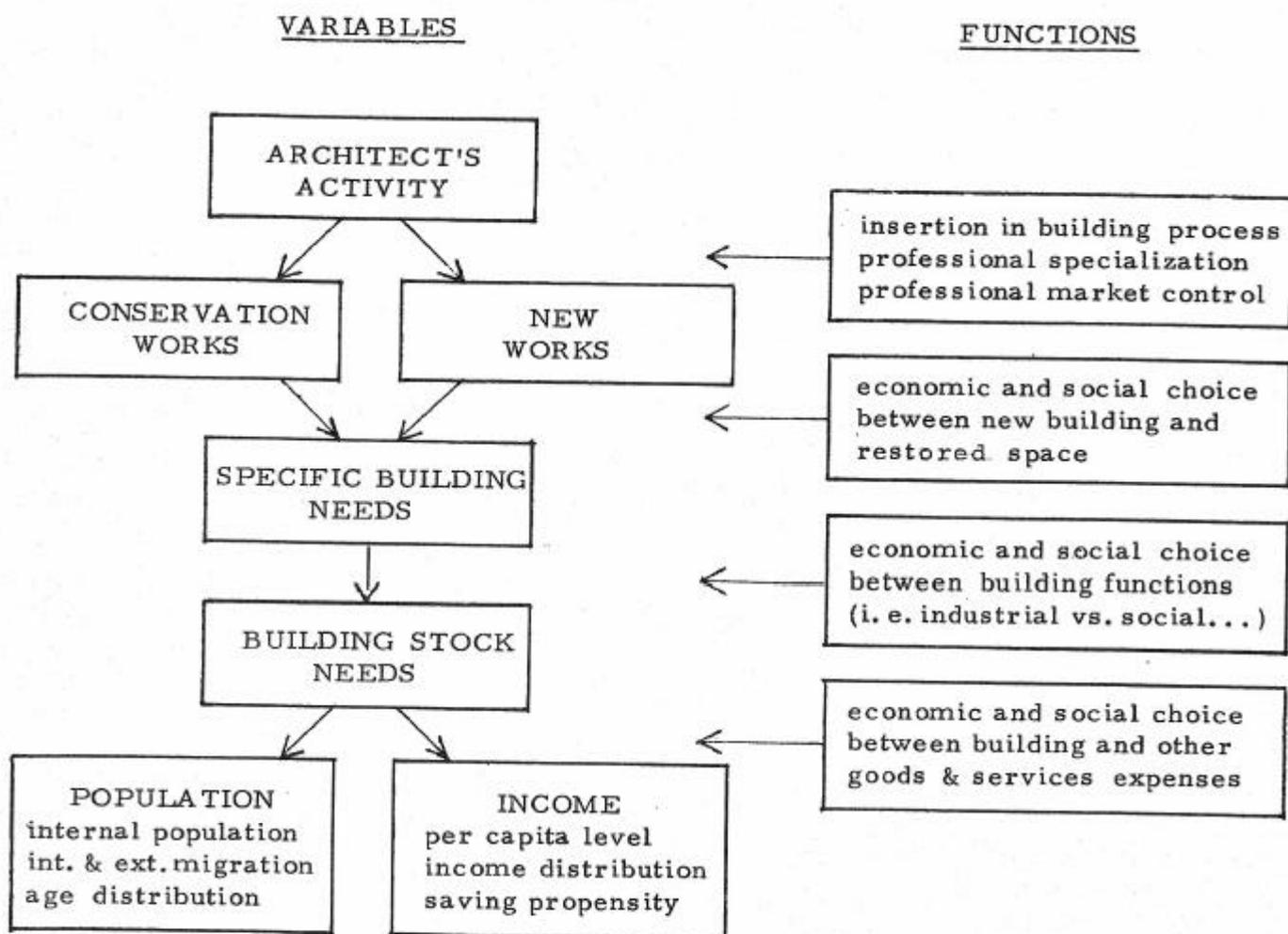


Fig. 1. The general theory of economic activity in the architectural profession.

In the same publication, I analysed the 1970 data on North America; the last census data then available. Here, already, I found that the university architectural graduate production was excessive in relation to the foreseeable development of building construction. In the following graph, taken from this same publication, I represented the forecasted offer and demand for architects in the States up until 1987, in limiting myself to the construction professions and excluding landscape and naval architects and some other activities covered by the census.

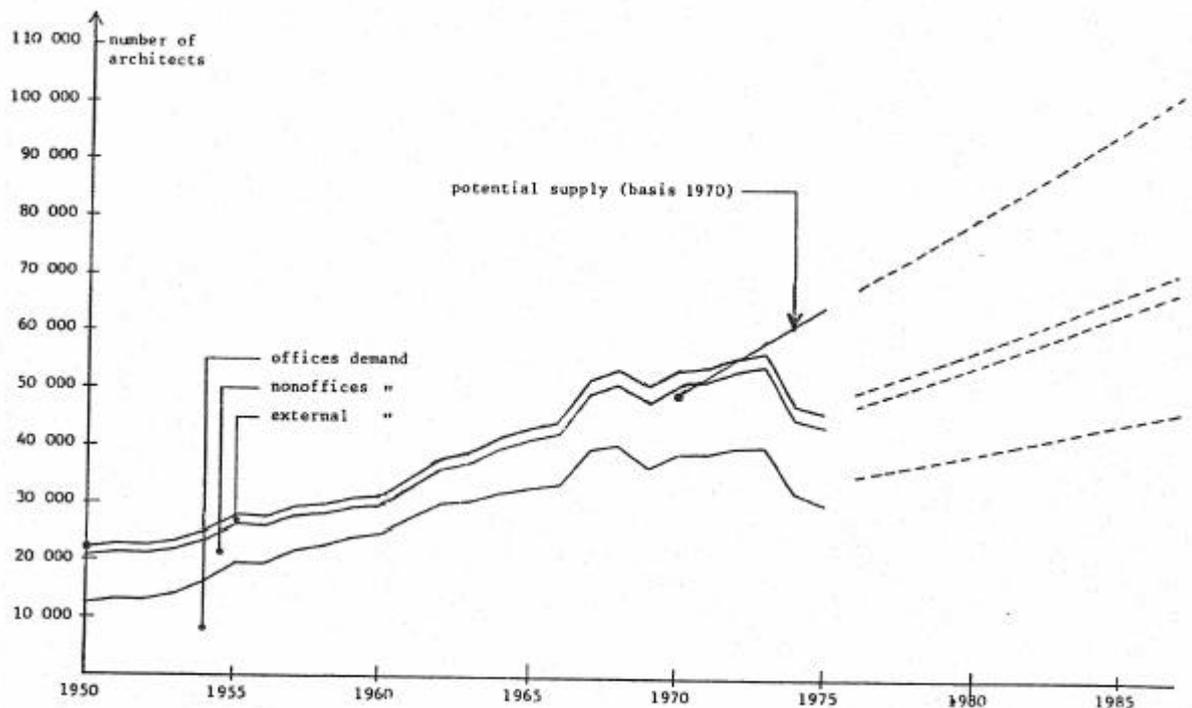


Fig. 2. Supply and demand for architects. United States. 1950-1975. Forecasts from 1976 to 1987.

I traced over this graph what has since taken place. Firstly I was overly optimistic of building construction, as it has not recovered sufficiently since the 1973 energy crisis.

Secondly, I was proved right in my forecast of the offer for architects whereas I had limited it to those graduates registered with the National architectural accrediting board, that is some 35,000 new graduates in ten years. It seems however, that some 10,000 other unregistered graduates entered the job market instead of continuing their studies up to a "NAAB" degree.

Thirdly, and this is the most surprising element, the number of active architects in 1980 in the States did not correspond to the demand, that is 50,000, but to the offer, that is 85,000... How can we explain this phenomenon?

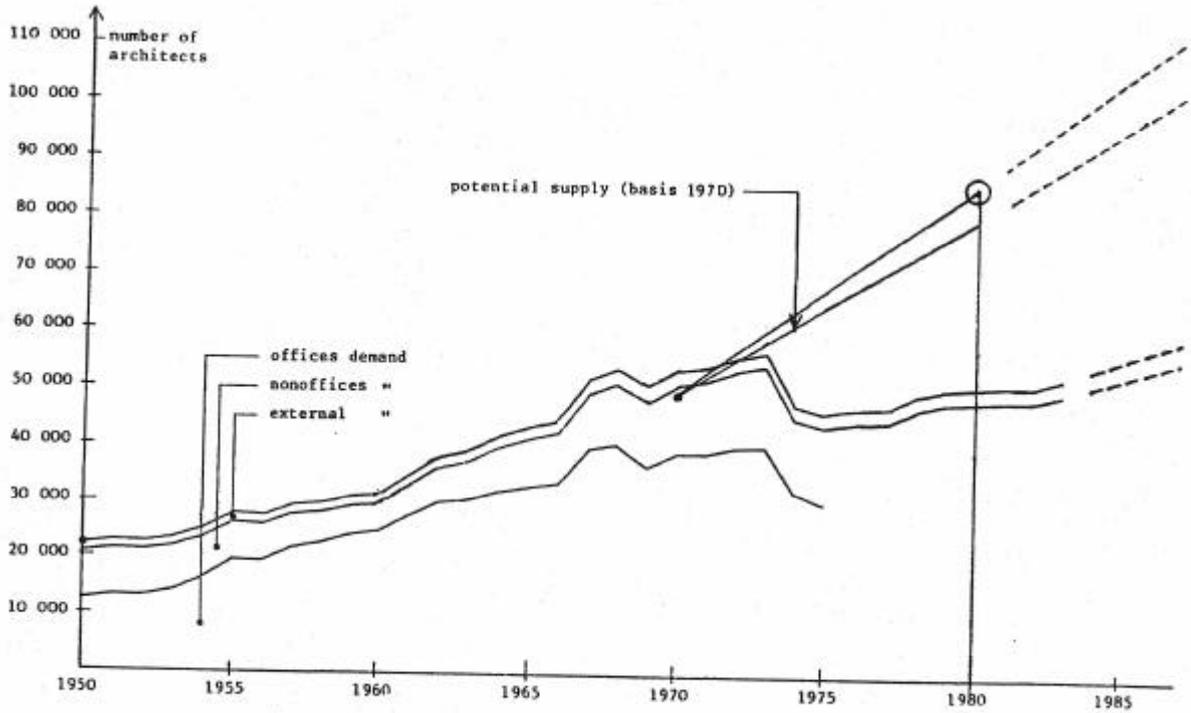
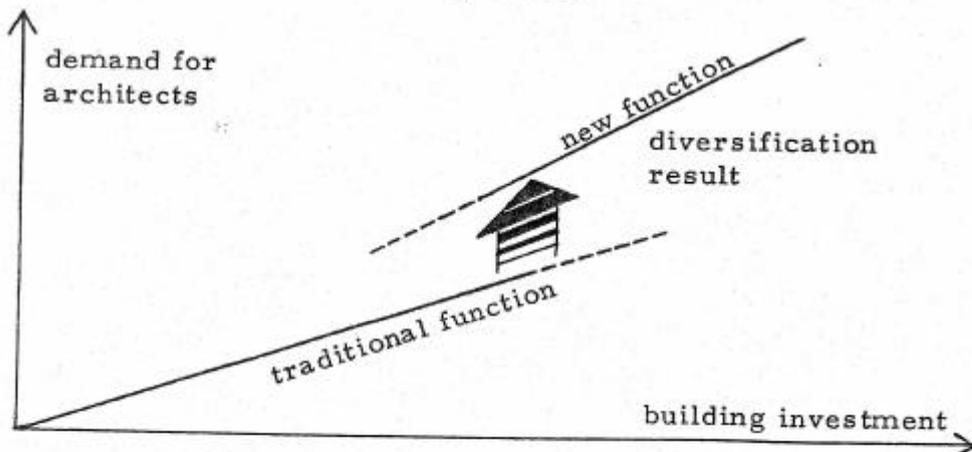


Fig. 3 . Supply and demand for architects. United States, 1950-1983. Forecasts from 1984 to 1987.

One possible explanation was already to be found in my report for Unesco. The surplus offer of young architects could be absorbed if new fields of activity open through the offer of diversified architectural services. In order for this to happen it would have been necessary to very rapidly reform university programs which were, and still are, very traditional.

In other words, if we return to the theory, the diversification would have to be able to have the following effect:



Let us therefore represent demand by the indicator of the number of architects employed in relation to building investment in the United States.

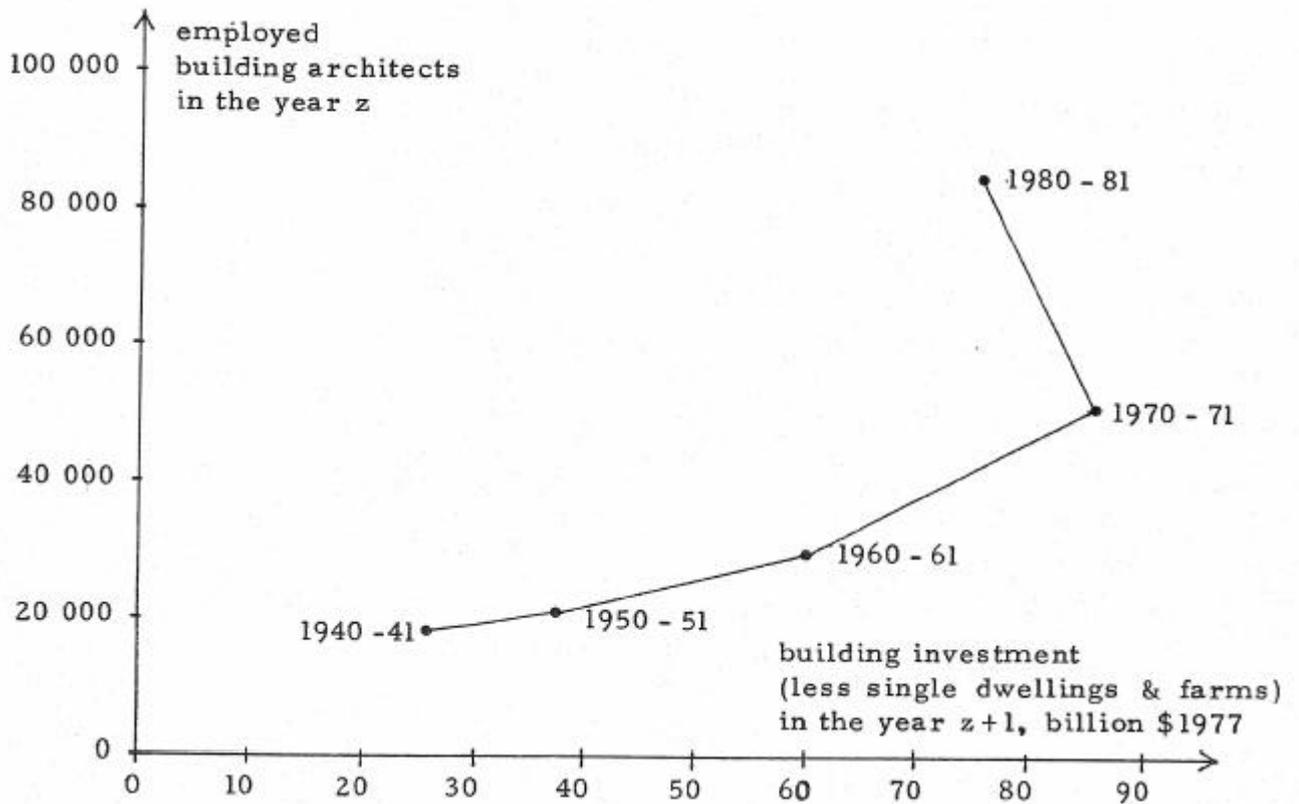


Fig. 4. Employed architects in relation to building investment. United States. 1940-1980.

At first glance, it seemed that in North America diversification had taken place and that, moreover, it had fulfilled the hopes placed on it in the seventies...

Unhappily, this is not exactly what happened. If we replace the indicator of employment by another, that of the revenues of the architects -equally given by the census data- we obtain a graph of irreproachable logic.

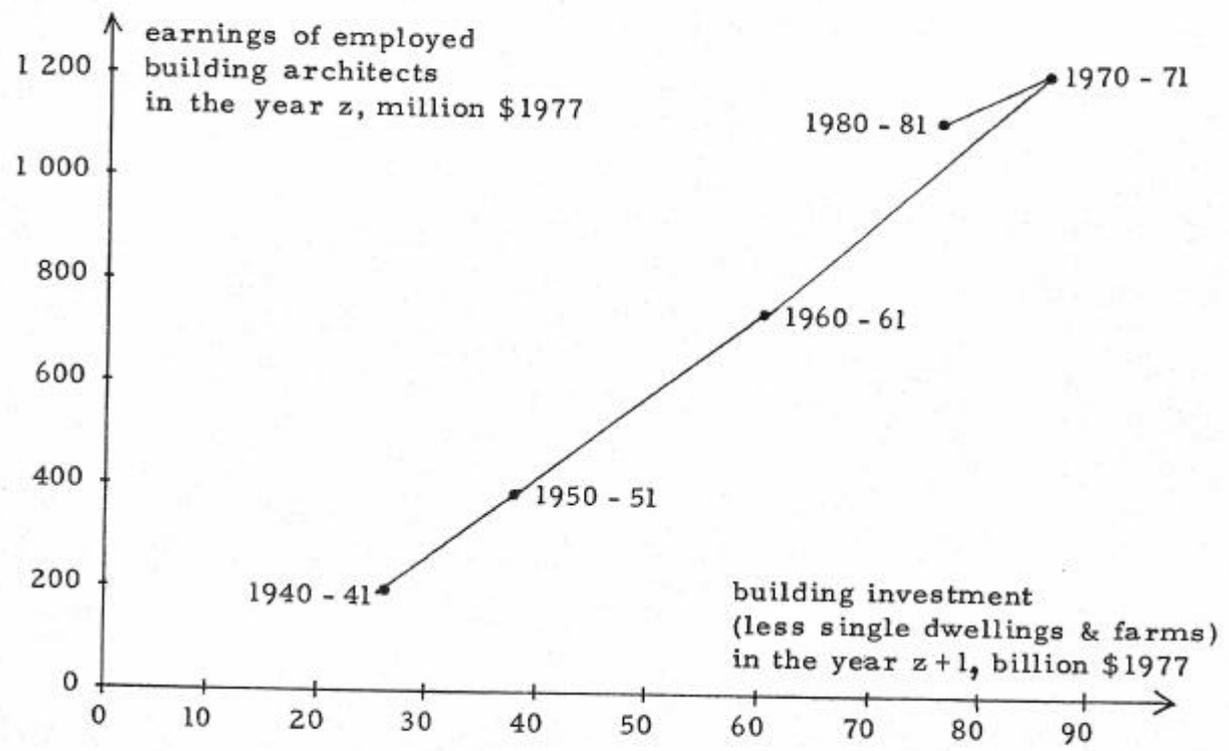


Fig. 5. Architects' earnings in relation to building investment. United States. 1940-1980.

As the level of investment had diminished in 1980 in relation to that of 1970, the architects' revenues had themselves diminished in consequence. Seen from the purely economic angle, the demand for architects has remained strictly proportional to building investment.

In all evidence, society seems disposed to bestow on the architect just recompense for the professional services required by its plain construction needs. It seems to matter little, either, whether there are few or many competing for the privilege of offering their services. The hard reality is that society doesn't seem disposed to spend a single cent more as long as the profession remains incapable of producing new and useful services.

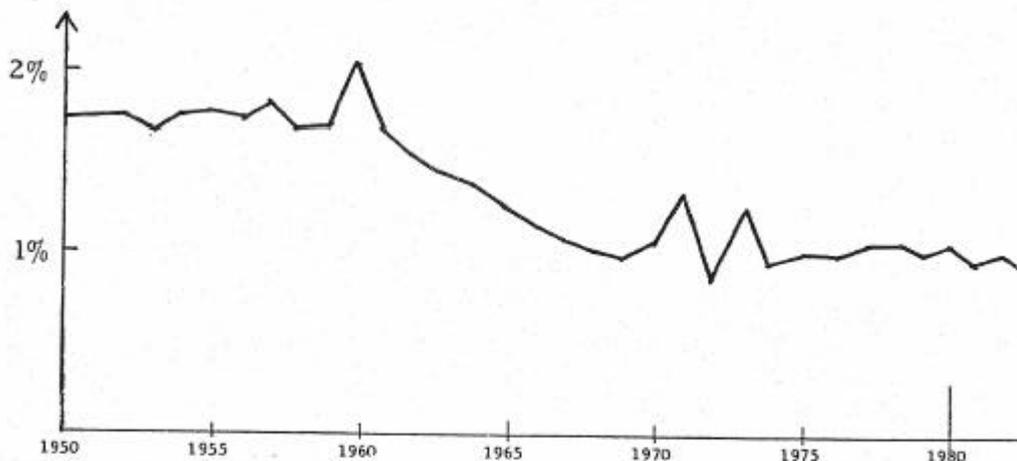
This is then the drama of the profession in the United States, in the other north american countries and certainly in many others of the planet's countries:

- plethora of architects
- inelasticity of economic demand
- incapacity of the profession to open up new fields of activity.

The cake is always the same size but the number of guests grows incessantly. I do not have data on this but I do not doubt that it is the youngest architects who suffer the most from this situation, forced into part-time, intermittent, marginal work, badly payed and most of all without a future.

Before concluding we should verify a detail. Since the relationship between the economic demand of architectural services and building investment does not seem to evolve, may not the latter's perspective inspire a certain optimism?

The theory referred to previously, shows that the need for buildings depends, in the final analysis, on the demographic and economic variables as well as on a certain social comportment relating to consumer preferences. It would take too long here to discuss in detail these variables and functions. I will content myself with a simple graph: that of the growth rate of the population of the United States. This rate takes into account at the same time the deceleration of internal growth as well as an assessment of external migration.



Tab. 6. Rate of population growth. United States. 1950-1983.

As for the economic variables and consumer preferences, we know how slowly economic recovery takes place in all the industrial countries. To this is added a certain conservatism which, if it is far from being negative when applied to the built environment, remains nevertheless a social choice of heavy consequence for the dynamics of the construction industry.

In this sense, I don't believe that we are on the edge of a construction boom like that which took place after the second world war in North America and elsewhere. As we have just seen, the demographic and economic conditions are totally different. It is then on these conditions that the desired level of the built environment depends and as a consequence the flow of investment in construction.

Now, if I was an adept of black humour, I would recall what Kondratieff observed many years ago: the economy functions in cycles of 40 years more or less. I could also evoke Easterlin's thesis developed in his recent work "Birth & Fortune", in which the "baby-boom" and aging population phenomena are also cyclic with a period of more or less 40 years. I could therefore conclude: "Lets wait another 20 years and everything will arrange itself..."

SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In North America as elsewhere, the drama comes from the division of two worlds: that of needs and that of resources. Between the two, three gaps appear:

- the geographic gap: because human resources are not necessarily concentrated in the regions where needs appear
- the economic structure gap: because the material resources are not necessarily directed towards the economic sectors where needs appear
- the knowledge gap: because the competences required to fill needs are not necessarily available.

The widening of these gaps is probably the major problem of our society at the end of this century. The bridging of these gaps is also its greatest challenge.

Rooted in the past and in the present of our society, the architectural profession carries its share of problems for the future.

How dare one talk of the gap between needs and resources in the name of these North American countries when one generally thinks that the greater part of world resources are to be found in these same countries? I believe that I have explained to my colleagues, with help of some recent statistics, that the problems that the profession in the United States, Canada and probably Mexico have, resemble in many way those of other regions.

I have evoked the existence of three large gaps. I will try to reply therefore to the three following questions:

- what is their nature?
- what is their context?
- how may we bridge them?

NEW PROBLEMS

NEW CONTEXT

NEW SOLUTIONS

GEOGRAPHICAL GAP

The most acute needs occur most of all in regions the least rich in human resources able to meet them. On the other hand these resources are to be found in excess elsewhere. This is precisely the case in the area of the built environment in certain developing countries low in qualified human resources. At the same time, vast reserves of young underemployed architects are to be found in the main urban industrial regions.

The global economic crisis acts as a brake to worker mobility, either because a penury of employment produces protectionist immigration policies or that a better informed work force is more sceptical of "gold rush" myths. In this way, due to the nearly universal slow down in building construction, many architects prefer to remain underemployed in their region or country than to try to relocate elsewhere.

Greater architect MOBILITY appears to be the only manner to bridge the geographical gap between needs and resources in the domain of the built environment. Without waiting for the opportunity to present itself, architects must become more mobile in order to discover existing needs and why these needs are not being expressed adequately. Architects must then develop new means to meet these needs in transforming them into solvent demands.

ECONOMIC STRUCTURES GAP

In a specific country or region needs appear in different sectors of the economy amongst which material resources are to be allocated. It often happens however that the sectors where the most pressing needs emerge are not those benefitting from major resource allocations. This is the case most notably in the area of the built environment, which is deprived of means which are, in preference, for example, allocated to the defense sector or to the production of superfluous goods and services.

The structural character of the world economic crisis tends to lessen the availability of additional resources necessary for the improvement of disadvantaged sectors. This is even more true in the case of the built environment; which is a sector composed of the most durable of goods - buildings - which demand considerable investment for both construction and conservation.

Greater architect INSERTION of the various sectors and at different economic and political levels of decision making appears to be the only manner of restructuring resource allocations into the built environment. Without waiting for solicitation in this sense, the architects must show more initiative and dynamism in such a professional penetration; occasionally renouncing an overly exclusive vision of the liberal profession.

KNOWLEDGE GAP

The satisfaction of existing needs often demands different materials than those to be found in place. This is particularly evident in the case of building needs which are increasingly specific and diverse. On the other hand, the available architects possessing a uniform education are, more over, oriented towards the more generalist intervention.

The explosion in university education has produced massive reserves of professionals in all the disciplines. When architects appear unable to offer the differentiated services demanded by the nature of the various needs of the built environment, they find themselves in competition with other professionals. These others, less generalist and less qualified from many points of view than an architect, are able nevertheless to offer more specific services in relation to the socio-technological characteristics of the demand.

Greater DIVERSIFICATION of architectural services appears to be one of the only ways of bridging the knowledge gap in the built environment without waiting for the completion of massive continuing education programs, architects must diversify and specialise the range of services offered in employing the latest technological advances. In order to do this, they must profit from possible inactivity transforming it, at the same time into a productive investment.