

A different kind of industrial design: The natural point of arrival of Utzon's innovation strategies

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Whilst the focus of much architectural analysis of Utzon's work has been directed at the relationship between 'master' and 'pieces', be them the Sydney Opera House, the Kuwaiti Parliament or the church in Bangsvaerd, it can be argued that Utzon's most significant contribution to the culture of building in the XX century precedes these artifacts by revolving around his understanding of 'process' and the socio-technical relationship that should bind building parties together.

Some of the industrial organization ideas put initially forward by him in Sydney and in other project locales have been picked up by others in the course of the last 30 years – for example Foster, Gehry, Siza, Souto de Moura and Mangado – and now form part of our contemporary understanding of alternative design and construction procurement paths.

At the same time, it could also be said that the projects to which these ideas have been or are being applied are possibly the ones that need them the least, in light of their high architectural status and thus privileged 'monumental' dimension, and the presence of high patronage.

By contrast, Utzon's industrial approach to building design is most needed in those under-resourced sectors where spatial invention from first principles and strategic thinking in relation to the material context are critical (and yet not often found) elements of success. These sectors include remote and low-cost housing, service infrastructure, humanitarian construction and immediate disaster relief.

From this perspective, and given the evolutionary path of the industry that contributed to the realization of Utzon's ideas, at least in Australia, it is not unreasonable to speculate that, today, Utzon's original spirit ought to be searched for (and hopefully found) in the architectural scripting of anonymous building programs rather than the building of large architectural statements.