
keynote

DESIGNING DEMOCRACY: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT PROJECT

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After a gap of nearly three centuries, a referendum on devolution in 1997 has brought back a Parliament to Scotland. The creation of this new democratic structure has led to the generation of a new physical structure which is probably Scotland's most prestigious and culturally significant building for at least a century.

The project perfectly illustrates a series of environment-behaviour issues from the grand, supranational scale down to the minutiae of the detailed relationships between spaces. From the start the design involved questions relating to the 'ownership' of Parliament and parliamentary process and how our elected representatives should relate to one another, the public and the rest of the world.

What sort of forum do we want for our Parliament? Should it be an oppositional, confrontational one, with the parties facing each other across a void, in the Westminster model, or a more inclusive, co-operative way of doing things?

What provisions should there be for access? Both literally, in terms of the physical accessibility and 'transparency' of the building to the Scottish public and figuratively, in terms of the accessibility and transparency of the parliamentary process to scrutiny by the media and the world. How does the juxtaposition of functional spaces affect the way these processes take place?

How are constitutional issues reflected in the physical design? For example, how does a designer

reflect the relationship, and separation, between Legislature, Executive and Judiciary?

Can the physical design of a parliament reflect, or even mould, the way in which a Nation's government and democratic process takes place? Thus large questions about democratic processes join the more conventional concerns of a brief in helping to generate the design.

Of course a further complication is the fact that the project does not exist in a historical vacuum. Not only does the site at Holyrood have historical resonances which influence design, but the whole idea of the Scottish Parliament is laden with hundreds of years of political and cultural history. Until rendered redundant by the Act of Union in 1707, the old Parliament House was part of the teeming life of Edinburgh's seventeenth-century High Street. How can the new one use the technology of today and the future to recapture what was positive about the past?

In July 1998 a Spanish architectural practice led by Enric Miralles and his wife Benedetta Tagliabue, in partnership with Edinburgh based RMJM, was chosen in a competition to design the new Parliament building. Enric Miralles was one of the world's premier architects, internationally renowned for his work, including acclaimed buildings in Barcelona, Alicante and Utrecht. RMJM are one of the largest and most successful architectural practices in the UK and have an international reputation for their recent work in Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Petersburg. The Joint Venture company EMBT/RMJM has been formed to run the project.

In announcing the results of the competition the Secretary of State for Scotland said; “ Enric Miralles is one of the world’s most exciting and well respected architects. He impressed the panel with his energy, imagination and creative approach to designing a Parliament building within the World Heritage site at Holyrood. The panel liked the sensitivity and scale of his initial ideas which provide a blueprint for an exciting new building at the foot of the Royal Mile that sits well with the spectacular backdrop of Holyrood Park and Salisbury Crags”.

The Secretary of State went on to say that:
“The Panel were also impressed with Snr Miralles track record of translating innovative designs into practical buildings that work as demonstrated in his internationally acclaimed work in Barcelona, Alicante, and Utrecht. The association with RMJM Ltd will ensure that a Scottish perspective is maintained in developing the initial design ideas into a building that is both aesthetically pleasing and a functional working environment for Scotland’s Parliament.”

Tragically, Enric Miralles died on July 3rd, 2000, aged only 45. His wife Benedetta Tagliabue remains active in the Project as a Director of the Joint Venture company along with Mick Duncan and Brian Stewart.

The Design Team developed their conceptual ideas following their appointment and in October 1998 presented sketch designs which went on public display across Scotland. At this stage the general aims of the design process were to outline the main aspects of the design, including the zoning and key adjacencies of the various elements of the Parliament complex, establish the location of entrances and circulation routes. A presentation towards the end of March 1999, of the final scheme design was made to the Secretary of State for Scotland and other Selection Panel members. This stage advanced the design and considered the appropriate building materials to be used in the construction of the building. A further public information exercise of the final scheme design was launched at the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh on 12 April 1999. The building is due to be completed in 2002.

The project brief stresses in particular the need for accessibility and a whole series of environmental and sustainability criteria which will make this prestigious building both a National treasure and an exemplar of good design.

Chris Harvie of the University of Tuebingen in Germany is a Scottish historian who will set the project in it’s wider historical and cultural context. **John Kinsley** of EMBT/RMJM is Project Architect for the Parliament and will take us through the physical design of the building, using a series of computer generated animated ‘walk-throughs’. **Mick Duncan** is a Director of EMBT/RMJM and will discuss some of the wider issues raised in the design process.

(Notes on Keynote Session compiled by Martin Edge)