OUR DUTY TO PROVIDE RESILIENT SECURITY

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Paul Hyett challenges design leaders across the globe – regardless of their political context – to meet the real needs of our planet and its peoples.

Editor's note:
In our phone conversation to frame this quarter's editorial theme, the author informed me of a friend's decision to provide refuge for a displaced Ukrainian family in his home. His observations empathetically explore basic human needs — and the moral responsibilities of governments and architects.

The Scene

Luton airport, just after midnight, awaiting a family of Ukrainian refugees, my friend stooped to chat to a thin, hooded person slumped in a corner.

The Man

"Mick," just 51, looked frail and elderly. Shivering, pale, gaunt and with most teeth missing, he cut a Dickensian figure. And he stank.

Sheltering on trains for warmth by both day and night, service cancellations (consequent on rail strikes and plummeting subzero temperatures) had driven him to seek refuge at airports. Until, that is, he was unceremoniously expelled: It's not only busy commuters who are inconvenienced by industrial action!

Mick refused the offer of food: Eating made him nauseated. Dirty as he was, an awful smell emanated from his breath. An oral abscess? Perhaps bronchiectasis? For this and so much more, Mick needed urgent medical attention. The average life expectancy of London's homeless population is just 46.

He also refused money. Pride and dignity there! What he really craved was *resilient security*, a place of respite providing support for as long as necessary — something that, despite our welfare state's bold efforts, we still seemingly fail to provide for too many of our most needy. Sadly, the divide between rich and poor continues to grow here: 10% of our people currently hold half the country's wealth. It would take a U.K. nurse 21,000 years of salary to amass the fortune of our new prime minister — nurses' pay in the U.K. remains shamefully low. The global picture is even more nefarious: The richest 1% own half the world's assets, and they get exponentially more prosperous by the hour.

The Family

"Natasha," "Darya" and "Yulia" (respectively, grandmother, mother and eight-year-old daughter) finally emerged from airport security looking as exhausted as they were bewildered. Lives upended, family torn apart, home destroyed, savings plundered, lucky to escape with their lives; they also crave *resilient security*.

The Agendas

For an architect, the term *resilient security* would normally prompt consideration of agendas such as protection of intellectual property, establishing a robust reputation and secure market share, perhaps even ensuring that quality assurance protocols minimised risks of claims and litigation. Or it might be to do with keeping pace with developments in information technology and procurement or developing new design responses to the challenges of COVID-19, or the "woke" agendas. But the kind of suffering described above rightfully challenges our own selfish focus.

Since these are far from normal times, I focus my agenda and take my cue from last September's DesignIntelligence International Leadership conference in Madrid, entitled "Our Collective Responsible Response to Crises," and the subsequent Lisbon

World Architecture Festival. During the conference, an architecture dean reported her students' growing interest in more economically, politically and socially oriented agendas. Reinier de Graaf and Ana Pinto da Silva (the latter well known to DesignIntelligence) gave brilliant keynote addresses that illustrated the compromising impacts such agendas hold for architecture.

De Graaf offered a shocking sequence of PowerPoint images, the first comprising a map configured to collectively show the respective extents of the world's democracies, those parts subject to totalitarian control and the areas he described as being under pseudo-democratic control. That is, claiming democratic legitimacy in circumstances where its essential culture and values (such as the peaceful transfer of power) are under threat. He then posted images that charted the proportion of the world's eight billion people that reside under each and quantified the proportion of the world's wealth attributable to each category. You got it: Wealth and population are both rapidly shifting to the nondemocratic settings.

All of which poses a significant question: At this nanosecond to midnight, for the eco-agenda and the need for socially responsible development, how do the challenges vary for building professionals around the world in terms of designing for *resilient security* against their disparate contexts?

Wherever they are located, the burden is immense: As reported during my own Madrid presentation, in 2015, American architect Ed Mazria, co-founder of the China Accord, advised that by 2035 some 80 billion square metres of new building will be constructed across this planet.

That was the equivalent of 60% of the world's then-total current building stock to be built in just 20 years, by one generation of designers — and we are already five years or 25% in. If you want to know what that looks like, visit here.

The Responsibilities

Who will these 80 billion square metres be built for? How will they be built and for what purposes? The markets will determine most of that. Meanwhile, irrespective of political context, our fellow professionals haven't the proverbial "snowball's chance" of delivering the ecologically and socially responsible work needed without the effective regulatory framework of incentives and constraints that should be routinely provided by governments. Within democracies, that would require a renewed trust and belief in "government" and, across the international political divides, it requires a will by governments of all persuasions to work collectively and in common accord.

Sadly, the endemic mistrust of the state on the part of electorates, and their apparently expanding blind commitments to unfettered freedoms and deregulation, remain the order of our day. So, within democratic contexts, any worthy efforts toward much-needed development and programming policies are routinely undermined by the noise and chaos of the current political debate, the constant abuse of truth, and the same culture of short-termism that triggered the 2007 financial crisis. Together these issues routinely sabotage any sensible assessment of our circumstance and render all but impossible those basic steps so necessary to pursuing architecture's essential agenda — *resilient security*.

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> Construction professionals across the world must turn their efforts to the long overdue call for resilient security.
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Changing Agendas. Basic Needs.

Before any higher aspiration, the earliest purposes of construction were shelter and security: shelter from the weather in a place secure from intrusion. Hence, the Stone Age cave with fire at its entrance, and walled cities providing gated security overnight for those who worked the surrounding land by day. Indeed, *resilient security* was one of the primary purposes of construction from the outset: the city walls should not be breached, the house walls should never blow down, the gates and doors must always hold fast. Only when those basic needs were dealt with could architecture pursue its higher goals. The awful truth is that despite the incredible progress thereafter, we are fast regressing once more toward an agenda of simple survival as we face rising sea levels and an increasingly inhospitable man-damaged environment. Against that, the growing economic gap between the masses and the rich can only aggravate the socio-political challenges ahead.

Today, as we try to make sense of our world post-globalisation, we can do little but acknowledge the grim plight of Natasha, Darya and Yulia as they flee Putin's tyrannic, ill-disciplined and vicious army. But surely we can do better for Mick in his undignified loneliness and misery.

That possibility takes me to a wonderful passage in Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel's "The Tyranny of Merit." In it, he suggests that the continued pursuit of "equality of opportunity" for all, as routinely promised within our liberal western democracies by politicians of all persuasions, is no more than a cruel diversion:

> *"If, in a feudal society, you were born into serfdom, your life would be hard, but you would not be burdened by the thought that you were responsible for your subordinate position."*

Whereas, in a meritocratic society, it is:

> *"Difficult to resist the thought that your disadvantage [is] at least partly your own doing, a failure to display sufficient talent and ambition to get ahead."*

His conclusion that "a society that enables people to rise, and that celebrates that rising, pronounces a harsh verdict on those who fail to do so," brings us to two simple questions: how harsh should that verdict be, and do we prefer to live in a society that accepts, but limits, the extent of inequalities, whilst providing a "safety net" for those least able to provide for themselves?

Little doubt what Mick would say!

MICHAEL J. SANDEL

The Tyranny of Merit

What's Become of the Common Good?

allen lane
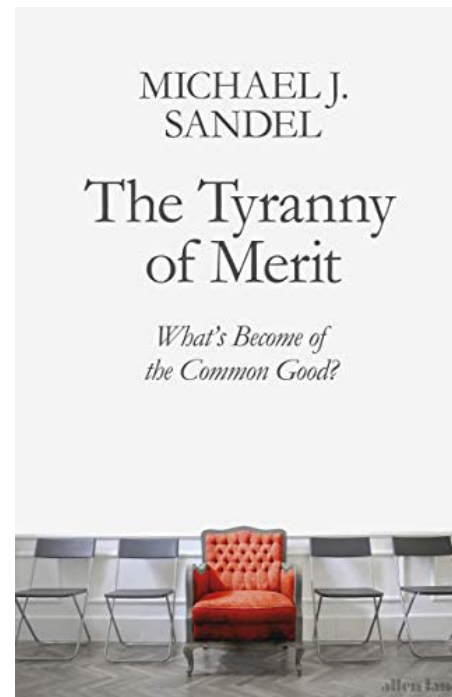
Fairness vs. Power

Sandel's argument, distilled, is the reason why *resilient security* must ultimately shake down to delivering that fairer socio-eco-political context, one in which we can create an architecture better geared to serving our wider society in as utilitarian a fashion as possible. That is, ensuring the ongoing supplies of sustainable hospitals, schools and homes that our citizens so need, including, even, somewhere for Mick. But unless we temper the excesses of our market forces, re-establish some trust in politics and begin to get some accord around truth, we will have ever more difficulty in designing and building what our societies really need. Those with power and money have always enjoyed the ability to deliver their architectures: the pharaohs, the emperors, the dictators, the religions and, recently in free market economies, big business. However, the emerging clash in the west between increasingly unrestricted market forces and the needs of our planet and its people is variously testing democratic governments to their limits, so much so that the famous Churchillian quote, "Democracy is the worst form of government — except for all the others that have been tried," might well come under renewed scrutiny.

Indeed, unless our democratic systems mature and "step up," they will fail our planet at its time of gravest danger. It's even conceivable that an enlightened totalitarian system might do better! But irrespective of context, for the sake of humanity and our ecology, construction professionals across the world must turn their efforts to the long overdue call for *resilient security*.

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Paul Hyett, PPRIBA, Hon FAIA, is past president of the RIBA, co-founder of Vickery Hyett Architects and a regular contributor to DesignIntelligence.