



A Message for 2010: is your head STILL in the sand?

Leading up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, a few 'poorly-worded emails' from climate scientists threatened to destabilise the chances of arriving at a meaningful agreement on decarbonising the future of humanity.

You might be forgiven for wondering why, and indeed how, there can still be scepticism that humankind detrimentally affects the global climate. However, I for one believe climate change is a symptom and not the cause of the problem. The cause is, essentially the ever increasing imbalance between human activity with the 'ecological capacity' of the Earth. **So we should focus on how we square population expansion and growth based economic policy with the finite boundaries of the planet.**

It scarcely matters whether climate change is actually man-made. We know that the polar ice caps are disappearing; glaciers on every continent are shrinking; sea levels are rising. There are unprecedented droughts in many parts of the world. Enormous methane gas releases from melting permafrosts and acidification of the oceans may in turn release yet more greenhouse gases and destroy vast swathes of the food chain. Oil and gas reserves are running out and our essential life-sustaining resources - water, fish stocks, arable land, and rain forests - are being overrun by the demands of exponential human population growth. Business as usual is not an option!

As I see it, the human race at this moment is like an ostrich with its head in the sand. We are all in denial about the enormity of the challenge and the impact this might have on our lives.

As architects, we can do quite a lot to make a difference. Obviously, we can learn to make buildings which use less energy and produce less pollution. We can help our clients to imagine and express practical alternatives to lifestyles which are currently based on burning unsustainable amounts of carbon. We can inform and influence our day-to-day contacts - clients, fellow building professionals and the supply chain of the industry.

How about signing your practice up to the 10:10 challenge – save 10% on your current carbon footprint in 2010 (www.1010uk.org)? Our practice signed up and donated our Christmas card printing and posting costs to safeguard four acres of rain forest through Cool Earth (www.coolearth.org). Even James Lovelock, who proposed the Gaia hypothesis reckons that is worth doing!

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