

SSEG: 1st December event at 50 George Square, Edinburgh University

Colin Porteous reflecting on a PLEA 2017 keynote presentation by Adrian Leaman

Adrian Leaman, also well-known to the environmental architecture firmament over many years, presented his 10 criteria for a good building. Colin applied these to a prominent European building from the early 1990s, which a group of SSEG members had visited in 1999, and Colin had re-visited in 2007 – The Ökohaus, Frankfurt by Eble & Sambeth.

Leaman's criteria are given below, with notes as to applicability in the case of the 1992 Ökohaus added in italics:

1) uses locational potential;

eco-symbiosis – gives as much back to nature as taken (a very toxic post-industrial site cleaned, and now bio-diverse and ecologically thriving with hydrology a key component)

2) avoids unmanageable complexity;

passive design to fore – simple construction plus limited techno-sophistication (glazing)

3) minimises unnecessary dependencies;

no Aircon required – actuator control for roof glazing in atrium; okay if it gets a little wet inside sometimes when weather is changeable

4) promotes options – adaptability within reason;

'long life, loose fit' – collective of voluntary sector organisations open to change

5) communicates design intent to users;

simple plan and section, way-finding easy; simple controls (partly automated)

6) meets basic needs unobtrusively;

Öko-Solar glazing sophisticated, but near invisible; thermal mass has critical hidden role

7) is not hostage to management or design fantasies;

very much a 'what-it-says-on-the-tin' working and profitable building'

8) remembers its past;

appropriate window to wall ratio (WWR) for working areas – pierced load-bearing walls

9) recognises constraints, and uses them to advantage;

noise from raised railway track to south buffered by atrium – trains bring customers

10) anticipates risks and consequences.

Biodiversity nuisance? ... users not engaging with eco-ethos, and not adopting adaptive control options, thus compromising comfort? But discomfort usually instigates action!

