

Santiago, 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2017.

Press Release.

### **The Gothenburg Award for Sustainable Development**

Yesterday ELEMENTAL was announced the winner of The Gothenburg Award for Sustainable Development. For the jury, the office's projects create bridges of trust between citizens, government and business while balancing the three dimensions of sustainability - social, environmental and economic. They are a positive example that a city development strategy can, in a respectful way, include citizens that are often excluded in the development process.

Some of the previous winners of the award are Al Gore, former Vice President of United States; Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of United Nations in 2007 and a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize and Gro Harlem Brundtland, Norway's first female Prime Minister.

Receiving this award, fills us with pride and we are truly thankful. We need to confess though that we are not only happy but a little surprised as well. First of all because this is not an architecture award, but one of Sustainability, with capital S, no adjectives. It is not often that a group of architects receive an award in a field ruled by politicians that set the agenda. We were also surprised that an office that works in the southern hemisphere receives recognition from Sweden a pioneer and world reference in sustainability. Understanding that what we do actually resonates in the rest of the world it is a great honour for us.

There is no doubt that Sustainability has evolved to become a complex and difficult to solve notion that is not only about the environmental challenge but that also includes social, political, economic and cultural components.

The more complex the questions are, the greater the need for synthesis. Building the places where we live in –cities, suburbs, rural territories- is ruled by complex forces that as in every complex system, sometimes work in opposite and even contradictory directions. If architecture has any kind of power, it is the power of synthesis. By synthesis we understand the capacity to coordinate the forces at play integrating the individual interest into the common good.

At ELEMENTAL we develop this approach by doing projects. This is why we describe ourselves as a Do Tank more than a Think Tank. We understand the city as a shortcut towards equity. Public spaces, infrastructure, public transport and social housing projects are opportunities to improve people's quality of life without having to exclusively depend on the redistribution of income.

Social housing is not only a shelter from the environment; if it gains value over time, it can also be a tool to overcome poverty. If there is a lack of resources, design as an open system that allows incremental improvement for the different players can transform poor families into middle class citizens.

We can also think in the redistributive power of public space. If cities are measured in terms of what they can do for free, public spaces are a very powerful tool for communities. Citizens can enjoy and have great experiences in their everyday life in quality civic places.

This kind of award sends a very powerful and auspicious message. It is a way to show skeptics that we can improve people's quality of life in contexts of scarcity, and that this can be a reality not just utopia.