A WELFAIRTALE

TO TRAVEL IS TO LIVE!

SUSTAINABILITY IS OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH SOME PURITAN CONCEPT WHERE YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO TAKE LONG WARM SHOWERS OR TAKE LONG DISTANCE FLIGHTS FOR HOLIDAYS - BECAUSE IT'S NOT GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT. SO GRADUALLY, YOU GET THE IDEA THAT SUSTAINABLE LIFE IS LESS FUN THAN "NORMAL" LIFE!

WHAT IF WE COULD FOCUS ON EXAMPLES WHERE SUSTAINABILITY ACTUALLY INCREASES THE QUALITY OF LIFE? WHERE A SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE ISN'T PAIN - BUT PLEASURE!

WE ALSO ASKED OURSELVES: WHAT COULD DENMARK POSSIBLY SHOW THAT WOULD BE RELEVANT TO THE CHINESE? SO WE MADE A LITTLE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES...

ONE OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST COUNTRIES.

ONE OF THE SMALLEST.

MAO ZEDONG, FOUNDER OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

THORVALD STAUNING, FATHER OF THE DANISH WELFARE STATE
China's national symbol is the Dragon.

In Denmark, we have a national bird: the Swan (the bird formerly known as The Ugly Duckling).

To our surprise, we discovered that the People's Republic's primary school curriculum contains 3 fairytales by the poet An Tu Shing Aka Hans Christian Andersen, the Danish poet.

So in fact, all 1.3 billion Chinese have grown up on a literary diet of the Emperor's New Clothes, The Little Match Girl, and The Little Mermaid. It is almost like a small part of Danish culture that has been integrated into Chinese culture.

The biggest tourist attraction is the Great Wall, the only manmade structure that can be seen from outer space.

And the biggest tourist attraction is The Little Mermaid (which can hardly be seen from the canal tours).

Both Shanghai and Copenhagen are port cities...

And the urban fabrics are equally different - skyscrapers among highways...

But of radically different scales...

...vs European city blocks.

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And the urban fabrics are equally different - skyscrapers among highways...

In fact, the greatest Danish work of architecture, the Sydney Opera by Jørn Utzon,...

...is a Scandinavian interpretation of a Chinese typology - the Pagoda on a plinth.
We didn't really find a hook for our pavilion until we started looking at the recent urban development of Shanghai and Copenhagen.

This is a photo of Shanghai from 30 years ago: broad boulevards jam-packed with bicycles. Only 2 kinds of cars in Shanghai back then: Shanghai No 1 and Shanghai No 2.

With the massive economic boom and urban explosion, everybody wants a car, the streets are congested with traffic jams, and the bicycle has even been forbidden in some parts of town.

In the same period of time, Copenhagen has been creating more bicycle lanes and reducing car traffic. The bicycle has become a symbol of a sustainable city and a healthy lifestyle.

We have developed multiple species of bikes to move not only ourselves, but our kids and our stuff around as well.

We even have a so-called city bike that visitors can borrow for free and move around town before they return.
So when you arrive at the expo, you go straight to the Danish Pavilion. Get your City Bike...

...and then you ride to the Swedish, Korean or Azerbaijani Pavilions on your Danish Bike.

So we imagined the Danish Pavilion as an infrastructure for bicycles. Like a bicycle lane, looped around itself.
As mentioned, both Shanghai and Copenhagen are port cities. But in Copenhagen, the industry has been moved away or made clean. Former industrial sites have turned into parks, and the water has become so clean that you can swim in it.

In fact, one of the first projects we ever did was the Islands Brygge Harbor Bath that simply extends the urban life from dry land into the water.

So we proposed to ship 1 million liters of harbor water from Copenhagen Harbor to Shanghai in a tanker.

1 Million!

In the heart of the pavilion, we would create a harbor bath where all the visitors with the courage to do so could borrow a pair of red and white swim shorts or a swimsuit and take a swim in real Copenhagen harbor water.
AND IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS LITTLE PIECE OF COPENHAGEN HARBOR, JUST LIKE IN THE REAL COPENHAGEN HARBOR, WE PROPOSED TO CREATE APILE OF ROCKS AND PLACE THE ACTUAL LITTLE MERMAID. NOT A COPY, BUT THE REAL DEAL.

H.C. ANDERSEN'S MOTTO WAS: "TO TRAVEL IS TO LIVE". NOW THE MERMAID WOULD FINALLY COME TO LIFE!

SO WHERE NATIONAL PAVILIONS NORMALLY COME ACROSS AS FULL OF STATE-FUNDED PROPAGANDA, EMPTY WORDS AND SUPERFICIAL IMAGES, WE WANTED TO DELIVER THE REAL DEAL. THE CHINESE WOULD BE ABLE TO RIDE THE CITY BIKE, SWIM IN THE HARBOR WATER AND SEE THE ACTUAL LITTLE MERMAID THAT THEY HAD KNOWN SINCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

IN THE ABSENCE OF THE MERMAID, WE WOULD INVITE A HANDFUL OF CHINESE ARTISTS TO REINTERPRET THE LITTLE MERMAID ON THE SPOT WHERE SHE NORMALLY SITS.

IN COPENHAGEN, DANES RARELY CHECK OUT THE MERMAID - IT'S MOSTLY THE DOMAIN OF ... WELL .... CHINESE TOURISTS ! SO FOR 6 MONTHS, WE WOULD ACTUALLY HAVE A NEW EXCUSE TO GO THERE - AND PERHAPS ANOTHER ONE TO SEE HER COME HOME.
The pavilion itself is a linear exhibition curled up in a double loop with the harbor bath in the center and the bicycles on the roof.

People will arrive at the bath... Move through the exhibition...

...and reach the roof where they'll go browsing for a bike. Mounted, they'll ride through the last part of the exhibition...

...and out into the expo area.
Structurally, the pavilion is conceived as one giant self-supporting tubular truss....

...similar to the hull of a steel ship....

The facade needs perforation for daylight and ventilation, but due to the structural performance of the truss....

...the degree of perforation varies with the structural stress.

As a result, the facade of the pavilion becomes this abstract pattern of light and darkness reflecting the flow of people and bicycles within the pavilion as well as the flow of forces inside the steel wall....
WHEN WE WON THE COMPETITION AND THE (MER)MAIDEN VOYAGE TO CHINA WAS ANNOUNCED, IT SENT SHOCKWAVES THROUGH THE TABLOID PRESS.

HOW CAN THEY PROPOSE TO SEND OUR NATIONAL SYMBOL TO CHINA?
The Nationalist People’s Party attempted to invent a law specifically against it. As a result, we were invited for the first time to speak at the National Assembly. Moved by the Chinese affinity for H.C. Andersen and aroused by the generosity of the gesture, all parties except two were in favor of sending her away. The right-wing nationalists because they wanted to keep her for themselves, the left-wing Unity Party because they preferred sending a windmill instead!
The final debate was held on the same day that parliament was discussing the bailout package for the global credit crunch.

9.00 to 11.00: Global financial crisis.
11.30 to 13.30: Mer-Maiden voyage to China.

For once, I managed to consume the entire meeting minutes of a two-hour political debate because some of the politicians, like Hans Christian Thoning, had really put their hearts in it.

"The fairytale of "The Little Mermaid" is a tale about leaving your home in order to meet another world, about uniting two cultures, and perhaps mostly, it is a tale about the belief that by giving up a part of yourself, you will get so much more in return."

We had found a way to turn politics into poetry.

Now that's a fairytale...
We recently exhibited the Danish Pavilion at Shanghai Urban Center. Known for sometimes exerting public censorship, it was no surprise when the Chinese authorities intervened.

1. We had used dated photos of Chinese party members - they were replaced by current ones.

2. We showed the map of China without Taiwan - it was automatically added.

3. The image of the fierce Chinese dragon was suggested to be replaced with that of a bamboo-munching panda!