

The challenge of the JKWIS is to examine the evolution of architecture and its significance for society, and to evaluate the practical steps we may take to best influence our surroundings for social, material and spiritual progress over time.

Introduction

Throughout the preparation process over the past five months, the participants of JKWIS 2014 have worked on defining architecture from different points of view. Ten different countries with different cultures have helped in the process of crafting a diverse and comprehensive definition for the topic of the symposium.

Taking into account the vast spectrum of perspectives and experiences we have had, we now know that architecture is more than just what meets the eye or the putting of bricks together. Beyond merely aesthetics, architecture must be seen as a medium of expression; one which conveys an ideological message. This ideological message encapsulates the visions, beliefs and meaning that the architect and the client intend to convey. To do this, architects design buildings which capitalize on human psychology by appealing to certain tenets of human consciousness, such as humankind's aesthetic senses, our behavioural inclinations and our cultural identities. In this, we recognize that architecture is a subjective art.

On the whole, architecture creates an environment within which people work, live and play. This is an environment within which human behaviour is shaped by the architectural structures that exist. In Prague, we have had the privilege of witnessing some examples of architectural structures in play to shape and modify human behaviour. One example would be the CSOB Building in Prague whereby an open office structure promotes collaboration and discussion amongst employees.

Finally, architecture provides narrative that binds people together. This is done through the amalgamation of various cultural and national symbols into a structure. We understand that architecture is essentially the art of space creation. However, this fundamental aspect of architecture has been influenced by other aspects of humanity. The result is a piece of architecture which allows both users and onlookers to understand aspects of a community's history and culture.

Overview of Contemporary Architecture

Architecture today has made a large transition in recent years in three major ways.

First, architecture globally has become more homogenized. Contemporary buildings are being designed in similar functionalist fashions, resulting in increasingly similar urban landscapes in major cities. Such functionalist architecture lacks a display and appreciation of local cultures.

Second, architecture has become more democratized in the designing of space. As individuals around the world become more affluent and more connected through the internet, they start to have a say over the design of contemporary buildings.

Third, architecture has started to become more environmentally conscious. This means that architects and patrons recognize the need for environmentally sustainable buildings, as seen in various accreditation schemes for environmentally friendly architecture.

Considering these changes in the state of architecture today, we have looked into three ways architecture affects society and propose the following:

Spiritual Progress

Spiritual progress can be defined as the pursuit of a set of values consistent to all, by the discussion and conversation of all, based on the tolerance and respect for each other's diversity, which comes from the understanding of each person's identity.

- The objective is to use architecture as a means to embrace and respect diverse identities and beliefs. Architecture can be used to pursue a set of values consistent to all while maintaining unique aspects of humanity.
- Practical Solutions:
 1. Create a nondenominational burial space, suited to the local environment, accessible by people of all beliefs and cultures. Such a place will be available to people of various faiths and ethnicity to use as a communal space for paying respect to deceased family. We recognize the uniqueness of the various faiths that people belong to, but we also recognize the similar desire of all humans to pay respect to ancestors.

2. Architecture should be more human-centred in the sense that before particular structural designs are created, there should be more community input. Architects should seek to receive feedback from the community and iterate in order to meet the cultural needs of the people.

Material Progress

Material progress can be defined as a sustainable framework to create architecture that moulds the world around us to suit our identities and cater to our material needs. The aim of material progress is to create architecture that improves the standard of living for communities in the most efficient ways possible.

- The public should be more informed about architecture through:
 1. TV programmes that build a foundation in knowledge of sustainable values and
 2. Educational programmes installed from primary school onwards to instil an appreciation of sustainability.
- Governments around the world should be giving incentives and tax breaks for people who build environmentally friendly homes.
- Injecting funding into research & development innovations for practical application
 1. Biomimicry, which is taking inspiration from nature, to create more efficient systems and structures.
 2. More sustainable forms of incorporating energies into architecture.
- Making sustainable guidelines for development according to each nation's requirements.
- LEED Certification process.

Social Progress

Social progress can be defined as the pursuit of a compromise between the inclusion and exclusion of the people in the society.

Architecture should act both as a means and a mirror of social progress. This means that architecture should be human-centred, and targeted towards doing social good. For instance,

creative building techniques could be utilized to solve social issues, such as poor housing. As a mirror, architecture should reflect the diversity and unification of society.

In achieving social progress, we need to:

1. Build affordable housing for the poor

- Architecture can serve social needs while empowering individuals.
- The design of public housing can take into account social needs. For the poor, architecture can be used to create cheap and adaptive houses to meet their needs.

2. Encourage community spirit

- Architecture can be used to encourage individuals from different social backgrounds to come together, express themselves and talk about the similarities and differences in their social identities.
- Public spaces can be designed to more inclusive and accessible. This means that architecture should be friendly to the blind, elderly and handicapped.

Conclusion

Architecture provides a rich and diverse insight into how humans both perceive and shape the physical world around them. This insight is made cognizant because architecture is a vivid reminder of our history, value systems, ideologies and development of our society at large. The JKWIS 2014 Accord has combined our thoughts on a common human experience to realize that architecture is a multi-faceted discipline which requires multiple solutions to many problems that are not necessarily easily solved. With a combination of several practical solutions, we believe that architecture can build on a common humanity to benefit the world.