

OPINION

OUR SPIRITUAL UNIVERSE EXISTS WITHIN THE SELF. SO, HOW DO WE USE IT TO SHAPE OUR WORLD?

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1. A dangerous idea of material progress

That declaration by students to the Architectural Community “A Call for Curriculum Change” (Architecture Education Declares, 2019) is an important step in the right direction of seeking change of the educational curriculum.

The last hundred years of professional progress in architecture have pushed an agenda which has created the current crisis. The intentions of our community leaders, educators as well as practitioners, cannot be doubted, but the instrumentalities have been flawed at the roots.

The architectural profession is part of overall societal processes which, in the last few hundred years, have championed an ethos dominated by the idea of material progress by projecting outwards. We have been transforming our world *outside* ourselves, and in this process, lost the balance with our spiritual universe which exists *within* the self.

Ancient societies around the globe have maintained a civilized existence on this planet for thousands of years. It is only when neglecting the nature-resource balance that they imperiled themselves. In the last two or three centuries, however, we have managed to radically upset the balance which has driven “our planet’s life-support systems to their limits”. This condition has emerged as a consequence of the dominant world-view of a minority of the planet’s population, a minority which has neglected development of the human spirit and peaceful means of addressing material reality.

It is indeed an educational challenge to turn the gaze inwards, and some of us who have been working on an architecture of discovery of ancient values within indigenous reality, welcome this call from the epicentre of the materialist world.

2. A more sustainable reality

We invite you to connect with our efforts from the margins to find continuity with what many of us believe to be the original human quest.

This is not just theoretical speculation. The original human quest refers to the most practical of our concerns — the evolution of our species to a more sustainable reality. It is not a matter of starting another revolution, as we have done many times in the last century, creating violent upheavals in the ecosystems of planet earth. The present need

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and quest is for a **peaceful** means of approaching the transformation of the built environment.

The peace we seek in the world around us will come from recognising and reflecting the peace we make within ourselves. This recognition will be of our potential to heal the violent tendencies of a worldly existence dependent on material accumulation and the unregulated appropriation of natural resources.

3. Regenerative architecture

Another response to the declaration by architecture students, by Narendra Dingle, has referred to our essay published a few years ago *The Discovery of Architecture: ancient values and indigenous reality* (Ganju & Dingle, 2013), in which we attempted to discover a basis for architectural thought and practice in our times by presenting a four-part matrix to address contemporary realities. In his response, Dingle has given a brief explanation of the four parts:

1. Self as Community,
2. The Act of Building with the Awareness of an Evolving Universe,
3. Maintenance as Renewal,
4. Regeneration with Learning.

The first two parts deal with concerns which are common in architectural thinking today. Even so, there is a dangerous trend of rewarding individualism in design when it breaks out of, instead of reinforcing, community. This egocentric turn is unfortunately praised by the world media.

The next two concerns are somewhat alien to contemporary practice, however. As mentioned by Dingle in his essay in this series, “Maintenance is often left out of the scope of the architect wearing his designer hat”. This leads to the thought that if design is an expression of life processes, it must have the capacity to **renew** itself. Maintenance, therefore is the key to sustainability of the built environment, and it needs to be a fundamental concern in design thinking from the start.

The next concern, “Regeneration with Learning”, address our relationship with **time**, renewing our understanding of knowledge discovered by previous generations. Time assumes a cyclic quality when knowledge is configured as a spiral, connecting contemporary realities with ancient values. On the other hand, the insistence upon which much of contemporary design and architectural education is based — to avoid and deny the past — leads us away from the harmony that we are seeking.

4. A joyful new beginning

The application of this matrix to the education of architects is to be tested in a new undergraduate course presently being designed by an international group of architects and scholars. The matrix is being integrated with the principles based on the lifetime research of Christopher Alexander and his colleagues at the Centre for Environmental Structure, who have instituted a Master’s course called *Building Beauty* (Building Beauty, 2019) being offered as a one-year program in Sorrento, Southern Italy.

The new undergraduate course of four-year duration is to be started as a pilot program in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India, and possibly in a few more institutions in other parts of

the world. Those new programs will be joined in a constellation of “Building Beauty Stars”, working to heal the planet and make us feel whole again.

My understanding is that (and this is necessarily a generalisation) pedagogic principles today are derived from a background of fear. Teachers are afraid that students will discover how little they know and to hide this, they exercise authority through spreading fear, normally through examination/evaluation methods which are punitive in nature.

In fact we seem to have forgotten that true, unforced learning results always in joy. Learning happens when you discover reality (in simple terms, discovering something new) and this is accompanied by a deeply happy feeling. Hence the best examination/evaluation system should be based on measuring the extent of joy produced by the learning activity.

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