

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION

A WORKSHOP JOINTLY ORGANISED BY SCHOOL OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE, NEW DELHI and INDIAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS (ISOLA)

Landscape architecture encompasses the analysis, planning, design, management, and stewardship of the natural and environments. Four decades of landscape architecture practice in India has seen much change in terms of scale and variety of projects. Landscape architecture education therefore also has to keep pace with changing times.

A workshop was organized by the school of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi and the Indian Society of Landscape architects on 22nd -23rd October at New Delhi on Landscape architecture Education with the objective of reviewing the strengths and weakness of current academic programmers in the face of changing realities of the profession. It was aimed to be a participatory exercise between faculty members of Landscape architecture across the country, students and other professionals and teachers, to review and look for further directions in academia. What follows is a summary of the proceeding, of the workshop, distilled from abstracts, paper presented, and discussions that followed.

Four decades of Landscape architecture Education: A Review

A formal programme in landscape architecture at School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi was first recommended by Prof. T.K. Manickam at a seminar on Landscape Architecture held at the School in February 1958. After fourteen years, in 1972, the department was set up in consultation with Ford Foundation with Prof. Ravindra Bhan as the first head of Department. The next programme opened in 1993 in the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology, Ahmedabad followed by another post graduate degree in the subject in Anna University, Chennai in 2002. In the coming decade, there is a need to increase programmes in landscape architecture by 5-6 new courses.

Who will study?

Aptitude, Eligibility and motivation

Landscape design education should be able to develop students who transcend basic design skill to further engage with values and propositions. The success is judged by the values that the institute imparts and how these influence even average students. Aptitude and motivation are the byproducts of an atmosphere of learning that covers both education and practice.

At present in India, programmes in landscape architecture are being taught at the post graduate level only and are open to students only with architectural backgrounds. As the profession moves increasingly towards more ecologically responsible and sensitive design and with new and varied types of projects, it is desirable to have students from diverse backgrounds in post graduate programmes as used to happen earlier when the first programme was started as SPA. A landscape architecture programme needs to bring new ideas, different expertise and viewpoints in the classroom. Another recommendation may be to convince the education authorities to incorporate landscape architecture as a part of vocational subject in the high school curricula itself.

What shall we teach?

Purpose, Content and Structure

Perceptions

Lessons from Elsewhere

A judicious combination of training and teaching may be prudent and necessary for meeting the challenges of landscape education in India. We must enable discovery and adapt methods and models of inquiry guided and engaged learning. There is a need to revise, as needed, the existing and proposed programs syllabi and methods to reflect the true meaning of landscape education.

Landscape architecture is primarily the discipline of creating outdoor spaces in which it is important to understand scales and proportions, volumes and masses, light and shade, forms and structure, textures and material. One should view a specialization in landscape architecture as a continuation of five years of architectural education. Elements remains same in landscape architecture course but the fact that some of the materials used are living and growing, landscape has greater horizontal dimension than does architecture, at a larger scale, and the variables in landscape- the sky, the topography and the plant materials are often lost sight of. We must remember that it is a subtle discipline, forever changing.

To enable us to have a first formal exposure to landscape design linked to architecture, it is suggested that we tie in the landscape architecture elective that is being taught at under graduate level with the actual studio problem being undertaken at that time We should also reinforce the concept that landscape design is a composition “tied at both ends”, to the man-made environment at one end, and the larger “natural” environment at the other. The design has to have an emphasis on the process which should remain in the foreground in all the studio exercise. But we should also ensure that well organized studies and analyses give rise to innovative and exciting responses and that these get weaved into or translated to the design solutions. In this age of technology, there is also a need to develop discriminatory skills about what is good and what is bad.

Another layer in the learning of landscape architecture is nature appreciation by experience. In combination with art, literature, poetry, traditional and philosophical frameworks. Landscape architecture education must provide student the tools to perceive, question and demonstrate alternate concept of cultural mythology. Understanding the inter-relationship between human and cultural ecologies should be one of the main areas of focus in landscape education.

Some broad guidelines and suggestions for a landscape architecture programme are as follows:

- The entire first semester should be devoted to basics, namely soil, topography, hydrology, climate and vegetation. Additionally, introducing these subjects at the under graduate level will create awareness among architecture students.
- A well-organized studio with the right environment to move forward with any design exercise is a must. This includes a well formulated design brief, guidance to students for access to case studies, drawings& data, listing of relevant books, listing of relevant data & its availability etc.
- The approach in the studio should be based on student driven inquiry and grounded in real case studies, in real communities, the introduction of design exercises that address complex issues of urbanization such as the deteriorating status land-use, traffic and transportation, infrastructure etc. The studio approach should also reflect of the challenges of developing countries like India such as lost wetlands, fragmented water channels, and lost wildlife corridors among others.

- The involvement of students in live design projects should be encouraged, including opportunities to conduct field's survey, interact with inhabitants, stakeholders and development agencies, to provide them with valuable professional experience.
- The possibilities of joint studio programmes with other likeminded institutions should be explored, and inter-departmental exercise carried out with departments of urban design, conservation, transportation, urban planning.
- The exposure of students to relative fields and knowledge banks, and close and regular interaction with practicing professional along with experts from other field, should be encouraged, to engage students in different ways and expose them to new ideas.
- Research and documentation facilities should be created to develop the idea of integrating research activities in landscape programmes and sustain them in a healthy and integrated manner. Reading and writing should be further integrating in academic exercise.
- Landscape urbanization has emerged as a theory of urbanism arguing that landscape, rather than architecture, is more capable of organizing the city and enhancing the urban experience. The introduction of a short term course in Landscape urbanism would address this field.
- Dual-degree programmes should be introduced, as is the case in some other countries as a means to offer students a wider knowledge base and skill set thereby increasing their professional opportunities.
- A discussion on various Indian traditions and their meaning, representations, should be included in all courses, covering a whole range of regional and local traditions of tending and working with Indian land.
- The programme should allow students freedom to conduct independent research, explore unknown areas and indulge in self determined conceptual exercise to rationalize their thinking.
- The purpose of a landscape programme is not only to produce professionals to work in office but also to produce teacher, researchers, philosophers and journalists.

The visibility of the landscape architecture profession is still poor in public domain in India. Professionals need to be more aggressive on this front, interacting with government agencies, and designing more project in the public domain. There are a few government agencies that engage the professional services of landscape architects develop public spaces, - in Delhi these include the Delhi Development Authority , Public Works Department, Archaeological Survey of India to name a few.

Over the last few decades, much has changed in the professional concerns of landscape architects. In the present scenario of environment consciousness, landscape architects address issues related to ecology, health, hygiene, air and water pollution, conservation, sustainability among others. Professional associations of landscape architects across the world are trying to have a better understanding of climate change, ecosystem, and green infrastructure among other macro- scale issues. Academic institutions across the world have kept in pace with ever enlarging scope of

responsibility of landscape architects, and have upgraded their teaching curriculum substantially. In this new global scenario, it is imperative that the academic programmes of landscape architecture in India upgrade themselves to address the new realities. And at the same time these programmes should help in creating new sensibilities that have a strong regional and philosophical base.

Speakers at the workshop included :

Prof. Ranjit Mitra, Director, SPA

Ravindra Bhan

M. Shaheer

Prof.(Dr)Surinder Suneja, Head of Department, Department of Landscape Architecture, SPA

Savita Punde, President, ISOLA

Nina Chandavarkar

Dr Shishir R Ravval

Nikhil Dhar

K.T. Ravindran, Head of Department, Department of Urban Design, SPA

Prof. C.K. Varshney

Prof. G. Narayanasamy

Prof. (Dr) Rommel Mehta

Prof. (Dr) Priyaleen Singh

Akshay Kaul

Saurabh Popli

Ram Sharma

Suneet Mohindru

Prof. Prasanna Desai, Director, PVR College of Architecture, Pune

Kishore D Pradhan

RaviKakar , Chief Architect(NDR)

Savita Bhandari, Director, Landscape, DDA

Janhwij Sharma, Director, Conservation, ASI

Nupur Prothi Khanna and,

Dr Sridevi Rao.

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