

Folk and Architect's architecture

Quinta Monroy / ELEMENTAL

Alejandro Aravena's "Half a good house" is praised to be an intelligent response to social housing. Hassan Fathy said that "no people are entirely devoid of artistic creativeness". Alejandro has proved this which brings the client participation as essential to a harmonious way of building's aging. His works can be lacking confidence thus leaving it incomplete, which is arguable. Putting it in a better way: Is he testing his own work's truth to the people and place?. But is this way we are advancing to the next stage of solving our high-density urban housing crisis?

The role of the architect is now being challenged to serve greater social and humanitarian needs. Designing a habitat in an urban scenario demands social responsibility and economic knowledge, To obtain the best possible results for the benefit of the residents and society. Understanding the importance of the aspirations and participation of the inhabitants is the key for holistic approach to the design. Many visions of our public spaces never come up after scheme or doesn't work out because they're inefficiently communicated to the public. But understanding the aspirations of the greater community is hard, an architect cannot find what each one aspires in his own residence by fitting in his shoes. Architects are good with explaining designs to private clients but we need to improve on building consensual architectural spaces which concretises human emotions when working for the public realm. Architects comes up with modularity to solve the problem of changing variety and following language. But still does it fulfills the inhabitants personal aspiration of his personal space? No, it doesn't. The design would fail if the inhabitant feels alienistic or readymade which doesn't suit him. Because they are not interested in what you are going to build, but they are interested in what actually they could be able to do in there. It is difficult for us architects to understand this. But greats like Charles Correa, B.V Doshi have proposed solutions for similar situations through their incremental housing projects namely Belapur Housing, Aranya housing respectively.

SATHISH V

It's ultimately the wish of improving the individual's conditions, which is the case of both inhabitants and the architect. But the human nature of transforming the environment has a personal schemata, i.e. translating the designer's personal schemata into the concrete architectural space. But the problem in today's practice is who's personal schemata or intentions are these architectural spaces carrying and reflecting to the world around and the world it contains? The inhabitants? Or the Architects?. The Architects in most cases, if so, the idea of architectural space concretizing an individual's existential space is not achieved and goes void. Architectural spaces are given readymade to the individual as it is the creation of another individual (Architect) and carries and reflects the architect's intentions and existential spaces. The inhabitant needs to have the architect's attitude to understand and grasp the intentions and spatial intuitions that the architectural space emits. This leaves the inhabitant to feel plastic and ultimately he doesn't use the space like the architect would have thought to work like. Architects call this as improper usage of space and blames the inhabitants for the failure of the architectural space.

An individual's concept of things is influenced by situations it is experienced, each individual perceives things differently with his cognitive, instrumental and behavior skills which are results of attitude, culture, belief, personal idiosyncrasies and a lot more. Understanding this leaves us with the personal colour of the individual with which he/she looks, understands and creates his/her own individual world which is more than a reaction to the physical stimuli of the objects. It is hard for an architect to assimilate these varied personal colours and respond to create a space that would satisfy the existential needs of the individual.

'Individual needs certainly have to be satisfied, but they have to be understood, as part of a larger context. In other words, even our individual expressions ought to have a common denominator. In general, architecture should serve the public world.'

- Christian Norberg Schulz, Existence, space and architecture

Individual's identity is strongly established in the totality of his existential space. Architectural space concretizes a public existential space which comprises many private existential spaces. All levels of architectural space must have individual identity without which the image of the environment can be confusing and the notion of personal identity could be lost. So what is it that could be done by the architect to develop the standard of living through architectural spaces and also to address the individual's personal existential spaces which is a variable to each space. It's not that the architect is incapable of understanding and providing what the inhabitant is rightful to receive. It's the personal schemata of the inhabitants that the architect needs to

SATHISH V

adapt or allow for alterations in the architectural space he creates for the inhabitant. But how far can this allowance of inhabitant's schemata in the design can be taken into account? Should architects purely be a facilitator for the concretization of the inhabitant's existential space? It's the dynamic equilibrium that the architect needs to establish between the inhabitant's personal schemata and his schemata for regulation of the architectural space. Architects take a stand in the course of his career, to either respect the individual's existential thoughts or completely ignore the individual's thoughts and make a strong statement of his ideologies by translating his own personal schemata.

'People put the earth within them in the land they find, place the landscape within them on the landscape without, and both become one'

- Rudolf Schwarz

Alejandro Aravena takes the first stand and grounds himself to the participatory process with the inhabitants and local materials, and produces projects with simplicity that comes from an understanding of what will actually work. Alejandro Aravena's "Half a good house" addresses this scenario which allows the residents to complete the work themselves later and play an active role in raising their own standards of living.



SATHISH V

"We transform the lack of resources into a principle of incrementality, Let's do now what is more difficult. Let families take care of the rest through their own means."

- Alejandro Aravena.

This ideology is very simple from Alejandro Aravena. He doesn't complete the house but leaves behind the structure for future expansion of the house by the inhabitants only. This ideology of him doesn't come out as an evident character in all his projects but as a subtle character. This ideology popped up so evident when he was commissioned to settle the families in the same site where they were living illegally for decades instead of moving them to premises. But the land that they occupied only cost them a huge part of the budget, hence the building cost has to cut down to a significant level. Moving out of settlement when there is no opportunity of expansion or improving the standard of the built environment. And also people of relocation or redevelopment live in readymade spaces with no choice left out. It's the lack of personal choice and individuality that these redevelopment projects ignore while preferring mass production and placement in a shoe string budget and less time. His sound ideology in this project of introducing public participatory not only in initial construction but also in the later part without the direct influence of the architect addresses and solves every problem till its roots. This pulls out the individuality of the house which is merely a representation of the personal schemata of the inhabitants ,ie. The transformation of their environment is determined by their wishes and dreams, on their attempt to improve their living conditions. With this approach the smallest level of architectural space which comprises the personal expression in an urban level which serves the common interests, thus the personal expression has a common denominator ,ie. the individual need is satisfied while underplaying within the urban context.

It's this very ideology that other development or relocation projects lack, the idea of self growth and ageing over the years and architectural spaces can be timeless but not resistant to change. It is highly subjective to call this attribute of being flexible to change a failure or success of architectural space. Examples can be belapur housing, Nagapattinam Tsunami relief housing etc. these are few projects that have accommodated a lot of changes over the years. There are few people who call it a failure for not sustaining its original form and intentions but the architect doesn't complain about the change that the buildings had undergone. They presumed the incremental growth that it would undergo with uprise in the economical level of the inhabitants.

SATHISH V



1. Initial condition of Nagapattinam housing

2. Current condition of Nagapattinam housing

It's not about the imagery or the form of the architectural space that demands the primary concern while addressing a design problem, its workability and solution of problems that are present and that would arise. Alejandro has arrived at the best possible solution for the better of residents and the society, an understanding of the importance of the aspirations and intentions of the inhabitants. It's the arrival of this question again, Should architects purely be a facilitator for the concretization of the inhabitant's existential space? He can help individuals find an existential foothold by concretizing their image and dreams.

'I'm a builder of cities, I have stopped the caravan on its way. It was only a seed-corn in the wind. But I resist the wind and bury the seed in the earth, to make cedars grow to the honour of God.'

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

References

<https://architexturez.net/pst/az-cf-167881-1425206505>

<https://www.archdaily.com/10775/quinta-monroy-elemental>

Existence, space and architecture, Christian Norberg Schulz