Sustainable Design Collective - India
Tuesday 26th July 2022 at Senator showroom, Bengaluru

Core Team:
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Collective Members:
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Supporter: Senator

Purpose:
A 'think tank group of professionals from the A&D, IPC, and developer community in Bangalore, committed to acting as a collective within the workplace design community to identify developments and 'best practice' relating to sustainability.

This report highlights some of the points raised during the two-hour discussion.

Meeting 2 – Eco Design
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The second meeting was aimed at maintaining the dialogue of how the corporate office sector is currently approaching sustainability from both built environment and workplace perspectives and, specifically, "Eco design".

We had representatives from the developer community joining for this session. They could bring in a much needed perspective on sustainability benchmarks affecting occupier leasing trends.

"Eco design involves designing or redesigning products, services, processes or systems to avoid or repair damage to the environment, society and the economy."

Places:

- Operational carbon emissions should be easy to quantify as we have access to a lot of commercial data. However, there is a paucity of tools and methods to evaluate – we are also constrained to taking data produced by vendors at face value. All data is predominantly US centric and may not be compatible with Indian parameters.
- We must plan for adaptive reuse of older buildings as we can see the effects of increased new construction in cities leading to dense business districts with expansive glazing surfaces and concrete hardscaping adding to the 'heat island' effect.
- Public infrastructure in India must balance with the over construction. Nowadays every tech park must build their own STP plants, etc.
- Even though Government policies in cities, like Hyderabad, allow unlimited construction, occupier clients are questioning developers and wanting to lease offices in buildings which have a balance of open and built environments.
- Clients are open to higher costs attached to sustainable buildings and developers are upgrading older buildings to a minimum of LEED Gold. The pandemic has added a lot to this renewed push for sustainable core and shell certifications. However, clients should also follow through for relevant LEED & WELL certifications in their leased premises to maximise the overall experience.
- WELL certification has seen greater acceptability - indoor air quality is a great driver post pandemic and delayed return to work coupled with younger employees' needs has also added to the shift.
- Leasing velocity metrics based on whether a building is certified LEED Gold or Platinum should be documented and publicised. It is evident that a Platinum rated building will be more likely to be leased and attract a better quality of client who will take longer leases.
- India should also have climate action policies which mandate that an asset of a certain size needs to have a certain carbon footprint.
- Dependence on LEED & WELL certifications as opposed to IGBC (Indian Green Building Council). Many 'Fortune 500' companies are predominantly US based and, therefore, influenced by USGBC. The Government of India could have also promoted IGBC or even GRIHA (Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment) – similar to how Singapore has prioritised the Green Mark certifications.
- Clients want 15% - 20% to be reserved for electric vehicles and this causes electric consumption to jump higher. Cities like Hyderabad and Pune do not have enough options for green power – only a coordinated approach that combines economic policy, infrastructure, design, and operations will effect real change.
- A&D community should take the initiative to compute the carbon emissions for a project at the design stage and endeavour to reduce this through interventions in materials; logistics; MEP (mechanical, electrical & plumbing) systems; design and construction; waste reduction.

Products:

- The dependence on imported materials, as opposed to indigenous materials, must be reviewed and re-evaluated.
- Some 'green' products are being touted as the new 'in thing' but they are shipped from the west, and clients face a lot of operational and maintenance issues.
- Difficult to measure the impact of re-use. No one is capable of really refurbishing 'used' materials and finishes. This activity is very nascent and not everyone is geared up for the whole cycle.
- Though clients are talking about re-use, no one is practically keen.
- There are also very few examples which showcase the success of projects which celebrate re-use. As architects and designers, we also look at older fitouts and want to immediately transform the space into a contemporary design. So, change is required at all levels by reusing and demonstrating that this is possible. We need a 'proof of concept'.
- There are many sustainable and ecologically conscious locally produced materials which can be promoted. We need to look beyond the narrow constraints of LEED & WELL certifications.

People:

- General awareness of sustainability must be increased so that this percolates beyond the usual nomenclature.
- Over-dependence on external LEED & WELL consultants.
- At the studio level, younger colleagues have to be sensitised for basics and pre-requisites.
- Gen Z is very conscious. College education provides a good level of awareness but how do we capitalise to ensure that each team member is asking the right questions? We can see the younger generation picking up 'used' clothes or 'slow fashion' – how can this sensibility percolate into our realm?
- Some firms have incorporated practices which are worthy of taking forward – Internal checklists which keep sustainability as a key feature of 'all' projects and team members are evaluated regularly. Also, a team which focuses on sustainability and can impact teams and projects from the ground up.
- Sustainability should become a key part of KRA (Key Result Areas) or KPI (Key Performance Indicators) along with other 'drier' subjects like security and fire safety etc.

Outcomes:

- How do we work on mandates with international product companies so that they have 'India' based recycling centres so that clients and architects start to see actionable change? Currently all carpet manufacturers claim that their products can be taken away, but these are locations like Singapore and Malaysia which is not viable.

- Members decided to hear from ecologically driven and diverse design firms to understand what products and mechanisms could be brought into the Corporate Real Estate realm.

- Members decided to initiate an 'Annual Survey' which could be sent to multiple stakeholders: facility management; designers; real estate leaders; project managers to understand what their 'pain points' are and hurdles they face in implementing and executing for greater sustainability. Look to RIBA for guidelines for this survey.