Sustainable Design Collective - India
Tuesday 31st May 2022 at Shaw Contract showroom, Bengaluru

Core Team:
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Collective Members:
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Supporter: Shaw Contract

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 three hour discussion.

We have also outlined some potential outcomes for the future.

Meeting 1
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Agenda: Setting the Scene

The first meeting aimed to provide an overview of how the office design sector is currently approaching sustainability from both built environment and workplace perspectives.

What are the current issues faced by architects and allied professionals, actions needed and key barriers to change?

The meeting started with a glimpse of WOD and SDC's initiative to all members.

Places:

Current Approach:

For the vast majority sustainability is focused on operational efficiency like MEP parameters, building orientation etc. These can only contribute to a 40% reduction of the carbon footprint.

The major cause for concern for the industry is to figure out the remaining 60% which could be embodied energy from the construction products in current use.

Real carbon reduction can only be achieved by finding a balance of 'building less'.

Efforts need to be undertaken to research alternative products.

Buying green power leads to large solar farms which create an ecological challenge for the surroundings. These panels also need large amounts of water for cleaning. Lots more needs to be achieved for current green resources to create sustainability.

Waste management is a concern as very few cities in India can completely handle various waste streams and there are very few certified landfills. Tracing the journey for a product beyond a recycling plant is difficult to ascertain.

Clients have also been slow on the uptake as proper waste management is a cost component and even when investments are made there are considerable grey areas.

FAR has been growing exponentially over the decades especially in cities like Hyderabad.

Developers should look at creating buildings where 20% of the built environment is treated as common lung spaces which could be naturally ventilated similar to the Ecodeck concept being explored in some cities.

Clients, designers and developers have to explore outdoor work zones as merging boundaries between indoors and outdoors was a big learning during the pandemic.

Places:

There is widespread awareness about the benefits of Sustainability. Post-Pandemic awareness of health is driving organisations to consider sustainability seriously as a key to employee wellness and talent retention.

Clients have to be educated on the true value of 'adaptive reuse'. Even with so much awareness there is still resistance to go in for new, expensively designed environments. The Design community will need to take a lead to create some beautifully curated and repurposed spaces to demonstrate and create a body of work that 'walks the talk'.

How can architects take onus of the final built product when commercial obligations from the developer and value engineering or 'alternative solutions' by contractors come into play? In such a diverse and complicated industry how can we bring all stakeholders into a focused singular vision?

How can we change the consciousness of the end user, when the current challenges of attrition and retention are pushing client organisations to create lavish settings and cost is not a concern to build bigger and build better?

End users working in corporate campuses are generally aware of sustainable practices like rainwater harvesting and organic composting but will need to be further educated on reduction of energy, water waste, implementation of sustainable construction methodology. If end users are more informed and demand for this, a paradigm shift could be seen.

It is important for sustainability to be built in during the various project stages - material selection and related design aspects during the design stage, waste management during construction stage etc.

Products:

Most products used within offices are green certified and said to be 100% recyclable. However very few international product companies have realistic recycling capabilities or programs within India.

Is it possible with tight project timelines to carve out adequate time to enable design teams to thoroughly check every product vendor's green certifications to assess validity?

Most progressive companies like Google, Amazon provide extensive 'Healthy Material Checklists' but most products are international brands. How do we propagate the use of more local materials and products?

Often local manufacturers producing high quality sustainable products do not go in for the relevant certificates and green labelling due to restrictive costs and cumbersome processes. Good products cannot be used as they are not 'qualified'.

Clients who don't build often, sometimes challenge the use of a restrictive (green certified) array of products and want architects to look beyond.

People:

Sustainability is not seen as a profitable endeavour within design firms.

Not all firms have a consistent approach to training or dissemination of knowledge and educating within teams is seen as a challenge.

[to be continued in the next meeting]

Suggestions for Actionable Outcomes:

As a group we should approach and engage with teams in authority engaged in policy making so that we can look at real change.

There are many 'non-corporate' design outfits working on vernacular architecture and philosophy that is sensitive to the environment. Can this group invite some guests from these firms for knowledge sharing?

Currently there is no national database of embodied carbon and green materials. Can this group create a connected 'google' document and voluntarily spread this? Users having tested a product can keep adding real data.

A questionnaire with objective queries on 'what's working, what's not working?' can be created and sent out to industry stakeholders, other practitioners to get diverse perspectives. Idea would be to get some data driven information and just not opinions.

Conclusion:

Members suggested arriving at a common actionable framework at the end of the season's discussion. That could be made open source as a white paper or policy recommendation.