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SOMEWHERE TO WALK,
TO DREAM, TO BREATHE,
TO LIVE A LITTLE.

INSIDE :

THE IFJ SPECIAL EDITION ON URBAN PUBLIC SPACES

BUILDING THE SUSTAINABLE CITY OF THE FUTURE

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Buildings contribute to 40 per cent of all carbon emissions in the world. To outpace global warming, we need to step up to sensible, green design faster than we think. Green principles need to be embraced by everyone today; from the highest levels of government, policymakers and education to the grass roots levels of the common man. Given that our cities occupy a mere two per cent of the surface in the world, yet humans consume a net 75 per cent of the earth's resources (Source: UN Report on World Population Prospects). There is an inherent need to begin to explore the possibilities of a closed-loop typology of architecture. Assuming there is no energy, no water, and no waste disposal, how does one approach design?

There have always been two schools of thought on how to design green buildings. Some believe that buildings should be designed like an aircraft – highly engineered and hermetically sealed, to achieve a high degree of efficiency. The alternate view is that it is imperative to take climatic specifications and socio-cultural contexts into consideration before designing a building. I believe that architecture and urban planning play key roles in

increasing interaction between users and their surroundings. While project briefs are getting increasingly 'global', their response needs to be deeply rooted in the 'local'.

In India, to a large extent, we have always built and designed with limited resources and materials. With a local, socio-cultural response to design, the results have been more often than not passive solutions which further help to reduce energy dependence. In a land strapped for water and electricity, the goal when building green is to use energy, local and natural resources wisely. Optimization of all services is a pre-requisite to responsible architecture today. Unlike other nations, local resources and methods of construction are still easily available to us. Hence, the most effective approach is to build with local materials in a manner that responds to the climatic needs of the region while remaining economically viable. This sensitivity to local conditions will not only generate a robust and durable form but will also make the project socio-culturally sustainable.

The idea of sustainability should now move on from buildings to cities as well. Our cities are in a state of environmental



emergency; with an assortment of problems of population, traffic, and pollution, no water/ electricity, sewage, governance and global warming. Most cities have derelict land which is lying under-utilized and unused in the form of drains, leftover land, alleyways, greens, etc. The problem with cities which are not entirely organic in nature is that such layers get suppressed by policy and policing (represented by boundaries and walls) and result in non-engagement. Hence, these interstitial spaces present the only opportunity to expose layers that will result in human engagement and urban rejuvenation of withering cities. To be truly sustainable, we need to look at solutions apart from simply reducing emissions. Sewage treatment plants need to be fixed, water bodies need to be aerated, pedestrian accessibility needs to be improved through connections, and alleyways need to be restored.

A new, sustainable, urban blueprint needs to be derived from the opportunity that lies within. The approach has to be multi-pronged and bottom up to gradually bring about positive change in the city.

There remains a great need to mobilize organizational systems, finance, industry, and architectural imagination to aspire to this end. if

