Arcasia Committee on Social Responsibility (ACSR)

Report on ARCASIA Committee on Social Responsibility (ACSR) Events, Kathmandu, Nepal

Date: 5th and 10th October, 2013
Venue: The Soaltee Crowne Plaza Hotel and The Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu, Nepal

1) 2nd Meeting of ACSR
   On the 5th October, the 2nd ACSR Meeting was held at The Soaltee Crowne Plaza Hotel which was attended by 14 Member Institute Representatives.

The Meeting Attendance were:

Chairman, Ar. Joseph Kwan (HKIA), jkuda@netvigator.com
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Ar. Desaparamy Abhay (ALACE), paroth_1990@yahoo.com
Ar. Dr. Bundit Pradabsook (ASA), aoodbrando@hotmail.com
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Ar. Liu Peng Steve (ASC), liupengsteve@vip.sina.com
Ar. Farhana Sharmin Emu (IAB), fsemu@hotmail.com
Ar. Muhammad Arif Changezi (IAP), honsecretary@iap.com.pk
Ar. Sikandar Hayat Khan (IAP), sikandar@shkarchitects.com
Ar. Syed Zaigham S. Jaffery (IAP), xiaghamj@gmail.com
Ar. Sudhir B. Balakrishna (IIA), archsudhir@gmail.com
Ar. Terukazu Nii, (JIA), nivas@n-ii-architects.com
Ar. Sung Min Kim (KIRA), smkim@hanssum.com
Ar. Assoc. Prof. Norwina Mohd Nawawi (PAM), norwina19@gmail.com
Ar. Haji Abdul Halim Suhor (PAM), arhalimsuhor@gmail.com
Ar. Ms. Rita Soh (SIA), r.soh@rdca.com.sg
Ar. Ranjan Naresapillai (SLIA), sliagen@sftnet.lk
Ar. Suroj Raj Rajkarnikar (SONA – DUDBC), surojrk@hotmail.com
Ar. Sarita Shrestna Maskey (SONA – DUDBC), sshresltamaskey@gmail.com
Ar. Nghiem Hong Hanh (VAA), honghanhks@yahoo.com

The meeting was well attended with presentations of country reports from ACSR members. At the conclusion of the meeting, the 2012 Action Plan was updated with actions for 2013 in particular to the proposed Symposium to be held in Kuala Lumpur during the ARCASIA ACA16 in June 2014.
2) 1st ACSR Symposium on Architecture and Social Responsibility

On the morning of 10th October, the 1st ACSR Symposium was held at The Radisson Hotel which was attended by ACSR Member Institute Representatives, SONA Representatives, local architectural practitioners and students from Nepal’s schools of architecture. Over 100 participants attended this Inaugural Symposium where four local speakers and seven international speakers shared their project experiences in the area of Universal Design and Accessibility; and on Design for Natural Disasters.
3) Design Competition – Universal Design: Public Toilet for All
July-October 2013

Most public and private buildings in Nepal are being made without considering the abilities, age and gender of the users. The provision of equitable physical accessibility to public infrastructure for persons with disabilities is continuously being neglected, evidenced in the fact that not one single public toilet in the heart of the capital at Kathmandu is accessible or usable by a wheelchair user.

In order to address these issues as part of the social responsibility and obligation pertaining to all Architects, the theme "Universal Design" - Public Toilet for All was chosen for a design competition as it is a most important part of professional life to be engaged meaningfully in society in every aspects of life with dignity.

At the close of entry submission in September 2013, there was a total of 49 design submissions, 17 from the professional and 32 from the students’ category. Ten entries were shortlisted from each category, from which the three winners and two honourable mentions were all awarded with prize monies and trophies.

It is the intent that the winning design will be built in Kathmandu as a pilot scheme of the national standard for a universal design public toilet for all to be adopted by the Nepalese Government and others to follow.
4) Media and Press Coverage

Media interviews were conducted during the month of October 2013 in Nepal by The Himalayan Times and these appeared in the following articles.
“Social responsibility is something very new and having a charter will help convince governments and clients about what they should be doing.”

“WE SHOULDN’T BE DEALING WITH ONLY RICH CLIENTS AND BIG CORPORATIONS BUT WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO SERVE THE OTHER SPECTRUM AS WELL WHERE THERE ARE THE NEEDY”

JOSEPH KWAN received his architectural training at the Queensland Institute of Technology Australia and has more than 34 years of experience in international architectural practice having worked in Australia, United Kingdom, France and now 25 years in Hong Kong. He has also been the director of a Hong Kong NGO specialising in accessible built environments to help make Hong Kong more accessible for the elderly and people with disabilities. He was in Kathmandu for the ARCASIA Symposium on architecture and social responsibility which is conducted as a part of the Architects Regional Council Asia 17th Forum 2013. He spoke with Terence Lee of 175 Perspectives about the role of architects and socially responsible structures. Excerpts:

What is the vision and mission of ARCASIA?
ARCASIA is an organisation representing 18 countries or 18 professional institutes in the Asia Pacific region and we have a number of missions and the purpose is to cross fertilise ideas and ideas and encourage each other because among these 18 countries, there are countries that are more developed and others less developed. So we think our purpose is to help each other and share information, research, designs and our problems.

Is social responsibility gaining momentum among architects in the region?
I think absolutely. Social responsibility started only three years ago and I was asked to be the chairman for the social responsibility committee. I think it meant was asking all the architects to remember that we all have obligations to benefit society and that’s the question and that need to be balanced by not just serving rich clients. We shouldn’t be dealing with only rich clients and big corporations but we should be able to serve the other spectrum as well where there are the needy. We’re not asking architects to give up their rich clients and get out of their air conditioned offices and be brave architects. But we all have a responsibility to do things which mean looking after the environment, looking after our resources and helping the less able and even the disabled and disadvantaged. We need to look at human settlements and see what can we do as designers and architects and what can we do to select the right materials. For example, there are building materials that are very expensive and there is no reason for a country like Nepal to import such things from Germany or America when you most likely have some excellent building material here. All this adds up to social responsibility of the architect. You don’t go and buy expensive things but try to use the best resources that’s available.

At the policy level, there is a serious lack in terms of legislation to make it compulsory for buildings and public infrastructure to be made accessible for all. What role can architects play?
I agree absolutely that this is lacking. This committee has only been three years in existence but our next move, that I hope we can complete by next July, is to formulate an ARCASIA charter on social responsibility. I hope this charter and convention will be adopted by governments, NGOs and professionals and that will set up the mandate. I hope the 18 countries will sign up for this and once you have a charter, it will give us a better focus on what governments should do, what NGOs and individual architects can do. Universities should also start bringing in social responsibility in the course and I think we need to work on it in stages. Social responsibility is something very new and having a charter will help convince governments and clients about what they should be doing.

What do you feel has been achieved with this programme in Nepal?
I think it’s absolutely fascinating that we are holding our very first symposium on architecture and social responsibility in Nepal and I think it’s due to the desire to do something more for the people of Nepal and that’s why I’m so glad the Society of Nepali Architects have taken it upon themselves to drive the world by improving lives, especially for disabled people. I hope that our presence will help to promote and raise the issues of accessibility first. There’s a real need to provide access for people with disabilities which is horrible for wheelchair users, a blind person or deaf person. I don’t think there is enough of this in Kathmandu and there’s room for improvement and space for making things better. This is one area. The other is in terms of disaster or natural calamities. Nepal perhaps faces the same natural threats and situations as Japan or Sichuan in China and there’s a wealth of information that these countries have which has been gained painfully. This should be shared with the government of Nepal. The third issue is the lack of awareness about the issue. Through the competition, the students are now more aware of the special needs of a handicapped person. Hopefully they have realised these needs and so when they go out and build they design their buildings with this part in mind. The other part is for professionals. Before this process, I’m sure many didn’t know what to design for or how to design for a blind or deaf person. I hope that once again brings up the level of awareness at the professional level. I hope I hope that choosing the winning designs will be adopted by the government of Nepal and others and that they will actually commit to build these prototypes of what a universal accessible toilet can be like and develop these as the standard design for other cities of Nepal. There are really three tiers, awareness, education for professionals and physically asking governments to commit and build using such designs. So, it wasn’t just a talk shop or workshop we conducted here but having the thing that can be physically built and where we can professionally address the accessibility challenges for those with physical disabilities and disaster issues.
Experts stress the need for the government to wake up to the imminent threat of a major quake hitting Nepal

RAPID REALITY

UK experts urge lending reform

A new report into UK property market trends and pressures shows that lending criteria and requirements are becoming more stringent, leading to a slowdown in the property market. The report highlights the need for a more flexible approach to lending, particularly in the context of high property prices and rising interest rates.

THP property Plus

 ARE WE PREPARED FOR DISASTER?

Preparedness is the only way we can combat a natural disaster.
—John Quinlan

Change for the better and the worse

Coming to terms with the past is more complex than just preserving monuments and artefacts

A new report into disaster preparedness and response shows that many countries lack adequate plans and resources to deal with natural disasters. The report calls for a more integrated approach to disaster management that involves all stakeholders, including governments, organizations, and communities.

WHAT ABOUT OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE?

Known as the "city of temples," Kathmandu is home to a large number of historic and cultural buildings that add to the city's unique character. However, the increasing number of natural disasters and urban development is putting these buildings at risk. The report calls for a more coordinated approach to conservation and preservation, involving all stakeholders.