

## A designer's role for architects in residential community architecture

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(Continued from August 27)

The survey began by selecting inhabitant families at random in several housing schemes. Each selected family was requested to assume that they are given the option of regrouping themselves and produce a list of their preference of families they wished to have as neighbours giving reasons for their selection. Subsequently each list was taken up separately and each family in the list taken up was requested to formulate a similar list with reasons without disclosing to them any information of other families. These lists were pooled together and analysed to ascertain the families mutually preferred by each other. In most instances, over 70 per cent of the named families in the lists matched, while it also indicated that income level was not a crucial issue in grouping as names in any given list fell into different income categories. The reasons given enabled concluding that at least three predominant types of major family groups exists in a

community. If we may categorise them 1, 2 and 3 a summary would read as follows: (Slide 10).

Further, they were shown various photographs and sketches of various types of houses and several alternative combinations of domestic spaces to ascertain their preference. Again preferences were found to be consistent to the category identified. From category to category marked differences were established with regard to expression, domestic space relationships and their uses.

With this information it is now possible to develop a generic form. From individual to individual the initial medium of form may vary. It may be formulated as abstracts and subsequently as basic geometric shapes. However the combination of basic geometric shapes itself can be subjected to the cultural patterns and hence it is difficult to be presented at a discussion of this nature. (Slide 12). One projected for viewing thus could be controversial. But had the community and the group being known then the form could have been distinct because architectural patterns to be used to compose the form would

then have been known. Having arrived at a generic form, formation of the clusters remain the next step. The finding of the survey revealed that the first category (Slide 13) preferred smaller number of families in their cluster and a more private common space while the third preferred larger cluster with many families and almost a public common space. (Slide 14) The second, of course rejected the idea of a trapped space in preference to a linear arrangement, but when reminded about the smaller kids they preferred altering the linear cluster, to accommodate a smaller pocket. (Slide 15)

To illustrate a sample of this process let me project a cluster developed by a final year B.Sc. student for category 1, whose community identity has been derived from a factor external to them. That is the physical context in the vicinity of the new Parliament in Jayewardenepura. (Slide 16). Of course clustering in this manner is nothing new. It has existed in our tradition (Slide 17) in the form of the extended family houses around a central courtyard which acted as the groups, common space. These

(Slide 18) testify to their identity with respect to the community and the group they belong, but not to their individuality. This is not an omission but a limitation of necessity imposed deliberately. It was so because their survival strategy was to rely on the whole groups' strength and not on any individual which was characteristic of any closed society.

But, contemporary strategy is not so. It is based on specialised skills of the individual. Hence, prompting individuality to a certain extent is a necessity. In recognition people like Christopher Alexander promoted similar clusters with changes in the house form to depict the individuality while retaining strong ties with the group and community. A classic example is his Mexican project (Slide 19). But, we learn today that it has failed in retaining the relationships with the vital common space. People have wailed themselves off. What went wrong?

In the traditional cluster, inmates were blood relatives. Their family tie therefore was strong enough to overcome any dispute that arose (and disputes we know are many). Unfortunately, presently the

inmates of a cluster are not so strongly bonded. Water not being thicker than blood in dispute these direct open space clusters naturally fail. Is it not for the same reason that Alexander failed too?

In spite of these failures we know that the central space is a necessity. So, we are in a stalemate? How do we resolve this problem?

Let us examine the nature of the relationships. In the traditional context it was strong and direct. Today it's neither strong nor direct. So let us find an answer in that. Let us create our central space to which the link of the dwelling is not that strong nor direct. We'll do so, by breaking the common space into a more public common zone and a semi-public or semi-private common zone a transitional zone. This modification can take numerous forms. Here are 3 of its variations. (Slides 20, 21, 22).

Ladies and gentlemen, in arriving on this possible solution, we repeatedly tread on two types of skills.

Type A: Skills involved in determining generating factors of form such as classification of groups based on the nature of the commu-

nity, nature of the community itself in relation to other communities, classifications of individuals within a group. Type B: Transferring of above-determined generating factor in to generic forms, by means of relevant architectural patterns, arrangements of those forms in various clusters in using relevant patterns and even modification of patterns as and when necessary.

There is no doubt now that laymen cannot handle a task which requires such specialised skill. Yet the problem is, has architects acquired these skills? The latter by all means 'yes'. Architects have the former?

It is definitely an area of the sociologist. But it is not his entire domain. Only as fraction. It is no doubt if architectural education is geared to help students acquire this knowledge and those who are no longer students acquire the assistance of sociologists as just as one seeks assistance from specialist consultants. There is no doubt the designer's role will remain in the hands of architects as it always should for the sake of the coherent existence of the community.

(Concluded)