

Editorial

Architecture is a Philosophy and not a Dogma

A philosophy is full of questions whereas a dogma is filled with answers, says Bertrand Russell. Architectural design process is often defined as a creative process that makes attempt to find solutions to problems or challenges of individuals, groups of individuals or communities. We intend to go beyond this definition to state that architectural design process shall prepare individuals, groups of individuals or communities to find solutions to their problems or challenges. Thus, architectural education shall aim at emphasizing this process of understanding a problem and preparing the end-users to reinvent their need rather than presenting a dogmatic solution. Study programs include courses/modules such as experiencing architecture for students to ask questions how and why those spaces were created for an identified problem rather than using that space or its elements as a solution for someone else's problem. Design studios, the exclusive space where design process is learned and practices, often direct students to conduct precedent studies to understand the depth of their design problem. Again, asking questions from themselves or from their peers, design studio facilitates a collaborative learning. Design schools shall ensure that their products are free thinkers inquisitive and explorative to be creative rather than narrow-mindedly use a fixed solution. As such, research training is essential for students in architecture schools to become free-thinkers and creative, or in other words philosophers who question continually rather than believe in a solution provided by someone else.

The Department of Built Environment and Spatial Sciences in General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University in Sri Lanka is unique as it provides education to architects, quantity surveyors and land surveyors. The academic program is framed within the thinking of enabling their future products to be creative as they may face unprecedented challenges as professionals dealing with the built environment. Global warming, energy and water shortages, and many other challenges will test the competency of these professionals. The students are therefore urged to develop their research skills along with their specialized profession. They are to learn both qualitative and quantitative research methods and to embed these methods with their approaches to understand the problem and its possible solutions. As a core course, students learn to collect data, analyze and process data and document the results as a way towards looking for solutions. In other words, students are trained to conduct research and publish the results of their research. The papers published in this issue attest to the research and writing dexterity of the DBESS.

The first paper, "Sustaining Walkability in the Future City: with Special Reference to Central Business District of Colombo, Sri Lanka" authored by Sanjune, S. M. M, Nawaratne, A, Batcha, S. S and Wijetunge, M. N. R. presents the results of an in-depth survey of the evolution of a colonial port city. The authors carefully analyze the development of Colombo from a colonial outpost into a commercial capital of a country. They identify how this transition has brought vehicles thus threatening safety on the streets. It's noteworthy to understand that the colonial urban structure was walking-friendly and as such made the city livable. The authors, underscoring the need to bring back the lost life and livability of streets, argue that the walkability of Colombo should be sustained. Among the most striking suggestions is facilitating the diversity of space. It is a fact that the strength of a city depends on diversity and density. This paper may help the decision-making authorities understand the significance of mix-used zones over modernism-asserted zones that made cities without citizens. The second paper, "Drawing Elements from the Past for Nationalist Superiority: Deconstructing Political Subtext of the YMBA building in Colombo Fort, Sri Lanka", authored by Rupasinghe, R and Wijetunge, M. N. R, is more a typo-morphological analysis of a prominent building in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) was established to counter Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) as a way of instigating a Buddhist revival in the country. It's no secret that those who led this revival were following the footsteps of Protestants and the building showcases what

Gananath Obeysekera calls protestant Buddhism. The authors make a serious attempt to emphasize the use of past built elements to deliver the message of Buddhist revival. They use one of the elements, the octagon shape audience chamber of the Temple of Tooth Relic, as a striking example to establish their argument. The uses the Derridean concept of deconstruction to find how such superficial use of elements without their contexts cannot deliver the message. The authors clearly establish the fact that architecture is a philosophy, and architects should be asking questions rather than adding various spaces to compile a solution. The method of analysis is an instructive test for any architecture student who understand, as Aristotle said, that whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The third paper, "Biophilia in Healthcare design", authored by Howard, A, Chandrasekera, T, Jayadas, A, Wijetunge, M. N. R.1 and Gayantha, D. W. K. is a novel approach to describe architectural solutions. It is a fact that architects provide both physical comfort and psychological comfort to the users of their spaces. The authors make a novel approach through virtual reality to lower the stress levels of patients or residents of healthcare buildings. Many of us know that nature can be soothing and provide a calm and serene atmosphere and therefore may expect a direct impact on the users' stress level if they are exposed to such aspects in healthcare buildings. However, the authors find that residents' emotions did change but had no significant impact on their stress levels. They plan to continue their investigation to see if perception of nature or biophilic aspects in different cultural groups could have affected their way of response. This paper, however, should be appreciated for its novelty and for making a serious attempt to understand how the end-users could be empathized in designing healthcare facilities.

The fourth paper "Adaptive Reuse of the American-Style House in Sri Lanka: With Special Reference to the Satellite Towns of Ratmalana and Dehiwala-Mt. Lavinia", authored by D. W. K. Gayantha, investigates the significant role played by the so-called American Style houses in Colombo's suburbs. Authors argue how these houses have been under pressure for readapting to new uses as their locations now have become prime lands. The socioeconomic evolution that took place after the neoliberal economic policies in post 1977 era accelerated this need for readapting American Style houses. The paper clearly discusses the methods used thus contributing to the future learners well. Authors have conducted a well-informed survey of many cases thus contributing to the knowledge and showing concrete examples of ground research.

The four papers have diverse research aims and contexts. They, using substantive and practical research methods, attest to the diversity of architectural research. If architects are to provide a true shelter for the end-users thus empathizing with the end-user, they should be well-equipped with such research methods, or ways of asking questions. They, as responsible professionals, shall ensure that their designed spaces are true containers of existing life and of facilitating new life.

March 14, 2025.

Prof. (Dr.) Harsha Munasinghe
| Editor-in-chief |

School of Architectural Studies,
George Brown College,
Toronto, Ontario,
Canada.