

COMMUNICATION in ARCHITECTURE



Text by:
Ar Apurva Bose Dutta

Bengaluru-based architect Apurva Bose Dutta works as a freelance architectural journalist presently, following an interesting work stint with India's notable architectural journals. With a degree in architecture (India) and a diploma in Freelance Journalism (UK), Apurva, through her articles has been trying to highlight and decode architecture in its most pure manner. Collaborating nationally and internationally with a number of publishing houses, online portals and organisations/firms related to architecture, interiors, construction and their allied industries, Apurva enjoys exploring new subjects in design and comprehending their ideologies. Through her various initiatives, she is persistently working towards promoting the subject of Architectural Journalism in the country. She can be reached on apurva@apurvabose.com or www.apurvabose.com.

Architecture has invariably taught us to believe that buildings are communicators; Infact Man writes on earth through buildings which can then be read as texts to denote their functions, the period and the context they are built in. Is that supposed to convey that design needs to be completely self-explanatory and needs to be the narrative itself without requiring an external narrator? If yes, why is it that the discipline and the institutions associated with the discipline of architecture have over the years have realised the need and value of communication in design. Being an architectural journalist whose primary work is to decode architecture, I believe that the schools of architecture that still haven't understood the importance of communication in architecture need to get out of their slumber and accept that an architect's work requires communication as a major component of realisation of his design.

Communication can be Verbal, Non-Verbal, Written and Visual. Non-Verbal communication is the intangible experience of the building and Visual Communication is what one observes through pictures/drawings or the building itself. While both of these types of communications are amassed by the user/visitor himself and lead to unconditional views which can be interpreted in any manner; it is the verbal and the written communication (having already been interpreted by someone, in this case

the architect himself or any other architect) that an architecture disciple needs to be focussing on. Visual Communication gets enhanced due to another kind of communication in architecture - the graphical communication (by the architect and his team) that incorporates features of sketching, 2ds, 3ds, perspectives, physical models, renderings, line drawings, architectural presentations - which have a crucial role in representing architectural thought.

The terminology of Architectural Communication is interpreted differently. While overseas Schools of Architecture impart courses under 'Architectural Communication' which refer to 'Architectural Visualisation' implying Graphical representations in architecture (as mentioned above), many architectural practices refer to it as a means of strategising and making one's work publicly spectacle to generate more work.

When an architect holds a pencil, the creative juices inside him take the shape of a functional entity. To explain to the world what his imaginations and creativity have given birth to, the architects needs to exemplify a certain command on his communication. That is the basic need of communication for him/her. It further does extend to explaining other's works, seeing and being able to comprehend into words what one witnesses. The need of architectural communication need not limit itself as a means to just publicise one's work - its essential role is to work towards an exchange of design ideas, to convey the theory of the designer/architect and to further understand the conception of a building from a part-to-whole or vice-versa. For which, there needs to be a greater emphasis on written and verbal communication in architecture.

COMMUNICATION through ARCHITECTS

Verbal Communication

Architects need to interact with people from different segments - clients/users, fellow workers, policy-makers, public, media. Having to manage people from such different sections of the industry, an architect also needs to correspondingly modify his level of communication (primarily verbal in this case).

- **Client/Users:** When a client approaches the architect he is handing over his dreams, a lot of his money and thus he wants to see the best design possible. A building having sprung up from the ground cannot be rebuilt - while modifications can be done but the client doesn't want it. The client's decision of selection of an architect depends upon his satisfaction gathered during consultation where communication skills play a pivotal role. The client needs to build up faith and confidence in the architect and effective communication (detailing out the expectations from both ends and a genuine view of the final product) is the basis of this relationship.

In many instances where a design doesn't cater to a single dweller, there can be a committee who is out there to grill you, in which apart from your design your communication skills will need to be supremely polished.

- **Fellow-workers:** Architecture is a collaborative process; The end product of a building is not the sole idea of a single architect but a group effort of a number of people - the architect's team, landscape, interior, lighting and structural consultants, contractors, artists, masons on the site etc who need to get into painstaking details to furnish the final product. At the helm of these affairs stands the architect who needs to explicitly communicate the intricacies of his design and his visualisation to his co-workers effectively.
- **Policy-makers:** Architects have a socially-conscious role to play in the society. Articulation of the changes they seek in the way a society runs, planning of cities and their urban and rural spaces and finding solutions to overcome the challenges a city faces, needs unambiguous communication between the architects and policy-makers.
- **Public:** For a layman a building might be very functional, very aesthetic (which he gathers through his non-verbal and visual communication) but a thorough understanding of the design will not only help them form an opinion but also increase the demand for a better design in the future. An architect in this case needs to be able to convey his design in a language that the common man understands.
- **Media:** Architects have to deal with the media and here they need to be more communicative since unfortunately there are a whole lot of people who just speak and write about architecture without having any clue about this vast and complex field.

Written Communication

The lack of knowledge witnessed in the media about architecture leads to a fourth and maybe the most important kind of communication - Written Communication. The need for architectural writers (who can be architects themselves) has been ubiquitously felt - writers who not only know what, when and how to write but also come with a design background and its technical understanding. While there are many magazines/journals which speak about architecture in a layman's language, however magazines which probe into serious architectural issues need to be managed by people who have an architectural background. Buildings come with details which need to be described appropriately, and not vaguely.

Writing as a creative process has been found to be much like design. While an architect draws a narrative through design; a writer also designs a narrative. One can perceive aspects of design like functional elements (Information, analysis), clear

forms (order, sequence) and a certain style (word choice, phrasing, metaphor, structuring of thoughts) in any written piece.

For architectural students too, the written form of communication holds much importance. Dissertations and Thesis are two culminating tests of Architectural Students in their undergraduate and post graduate programs which categorically require the students to have written communication skills. How are students expected to go through this in the absence of good communication skills? Unfortunately we are no longer in the happy days of internet oblivion but in days where the cut-copy-paste method has become a rage. However in spite of this easy access to information, verbal communication which is needed during the viva-voce still remains a challenge.

The subject of Architectural writing has been acknowledged and respected as an important off-shoot of architecture overseas. In India the nation is waking up to the subject and it has been introduced as an elective in the B.Arch courses in many architectural schools. A couple of colleges in India also provide an elective of Architectural Communications in which writing is emerging as an important criteria. Awards and conferences are also being instituted for architectural writers. A lot remains to be done, but the importance to communicate in architecture is being strongly felt.

ASPECTS TO STUDY

For communication to come easy in architecture, the language of architecture is fundamental. A good orator might not be a good writer and vice-versa. Communication thus needs to be manifold in this discipline.

While verbal communication in architecture needs to take care of additional aspects like diction, pronunciation, presence of mind, fluidity, confidence apart from the content, it is the written form of architectural communication that actually drives the verbal communication. While verbal communication is a one-timer and can make or ditch your prospects, it is the written communication that stays on for posterity and can be subjected to various critiques at any point of time. However for both of them few aspects stay common - regular reading, detailed understanding of the subject, being observant, quick and avoiding aping of styles.

To conclude, is it safe to state that bad communication skills will not lead to architecture becoming successful or being portrayed in the right light...Certainly not - good architecture will always be felt; but then adept verbal or written communication in the right perspective will always be a major push for it. Communication should remain as an important tool to explore, comprehend, document and articulate architecture.