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THEORETICAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SOCIAL EQUITY IN ARCHITECTURE

ABSTRACT

The agency of change in the world around us is a product of an ever-growing, globalized mentality about how our communities, cultures, ideologies and social values are meant to interact. In efforts to create sustainable well-being amongst ourselves, architects have endeavored to coalesce those values into common, practical solutions. While the intentions and motives behind these solutions are meant to create positive impacts of both economic and social growth, the primary impetus of exposure to these design principles is obscured. Academic groups, religious organizations and non-governmental entities have become more involved in developing regions of the world, where both positive and negative impacts seem to coincide. In this sense, if we are meant to continue and engage a global sense of responsibility towards one another, then we are also meant to act critically towards these involvements.

This paper will serve as a general critique and placement of the global paradigm of "change", the thoughtful and positive purpose behind that mentality and how design is meant to interface with unique, localized and sensitive conditions that are pervasive in developing regions of the world. Through case studies that reference and interface with components of vernacular comprehension and architectural placement in the communities of Bageshwori and Narayanpur, Nepal, and Mukuyuni, Kenya it is intended that a better understanding of global engagements and agency between differing socioeconomic means of living can emerge. Further, an introduction to the disparity between forms of architectural knowledge will attempt to position these case studies as isolated pieces of the crucial assemblage in the architectural narrative of social engagement efforts around the world.

The following research outline demonstrates both a breakdown of this narrative and a strategy for this pursuit:

- Introduction to research and common critiques
- Development of thesis and argumentation
- Case study presentation community responses
- Excerpt of personal experience
- Final positioning of research as a catalyst for continued change in global social interactions

Inevitably, portions of this narrative will take place in a theoretical vacuum, but the overall goal of its extrapolation will be centered upon real-world or active implementations to create a balance between the academic and practical sensibilities of this evaluation.

Many qualitative or observation-based examples will be used to demonstrate hands-on knowledge in the form of community surveying on the ground, video conferencing and supplied examples through field notes interview styled testimonials that speak to the needs expressed in each community.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The premise of this presentation of arguments is to explore personal knowledge gained from interacting in

environments where information and theory cannot be treated as singular directives. Between involvement in three communities abroad, I have striven to work in capacities that treat its beneficiaries as the primary motivators behind each developmental decision. In each scenario, the quality of the built environment has created enormous factors through which both detriment from foreign actors have been inherent in their collective endeavors. While I believe that all members of society are meant to interact and inform each other, this writing is an attempt to recognize both the faults and triumphs of working as a foreign body in places where transitional resources are limited; where a United States based initiative is largely responsible for the collection of funds and the recipient is treated as an executive in the process of properly using applying those funds to their desired solutions.

Despite personal experience in these situations, I would like to first acknowledge that the information presented is an attempt at objective clarification of the role of social engagement in architecture. Inevitably, the bias of my experiences will be present, but it is my hope that this writing serves as an object of introspection and correspondence in the course of explaining the involvement of theory and practical pursuits in efforts that globalize the role of the designer and their interface with worldly issues.

INTRODUCTION

In the practice of architecture there are key factors that repeatedly present themselves as fixtures of design and incorporation of that design at levels concerning both immediate local influence and global implications. These factors are important in the sense that architectural education is meant to encompass all aspects of the design process, and indeed, architectural education should be a never-ending journey of discovery and appreciation for that process. Unfortunately, there are lesser known forms of theoretical knowledge and exploration that are left to those who wish to uncover the nuances of design development that interface with alternative social engagement theories. With attempts to grasp these issues in both simply articulated and abstract aspects of application, engagement theories regarding localized architecture and developing communities are often left in the sphere of academia; rarely is this knowledge disseminated through basic university programs, and becomes ever more scarce in the field.

While high design and specialized architecture play an important role in how one understands the development of form and the public service that is spacemaking, this paper will attempt to argue that equivalent emphasis be placed on useful community-based case studies in research courses and as presentations to the larger architectural community. In practice, this divide in the diversity of building knowledge creates large disparities in the design community's overall understanding for the world's most prevalent issues (Fernando 2009). These issues happen to include some of the least dynamic architectural forms, but simultaneously those that serve the most important purposes in society. These are structures that serve large portions of underserved communities, deal with access to education, healthcare, clean drinking water and the kinds of amenities thought to be implicit in all architecture – at least from the perspective of our present educational paradigm, which favors architectural sex appeal and a casual blindness to various pockets of society.

Of course, high design knowledge and other forms of advanced architectural nuance are not the problem directly speaking. Similar issues exist in the accessibility of valuable architectural practices that seek to make these crucial changes in our collective paradigm. Even those well-intentioned practices have yet to understand fully the gap of information between differently developed communities (Fernando 2009). Common builders and designers of opposing values struggle to make motivations align, and ultimately, it is a disparaging practice for those communities dependent on the help of those who know so little about their collective situations; that is, without living there or participating in firsthand accounts of service in the regions they serve. In this capacity, the practice of architecture must become more anthropological, more scientific and more socially equitable towards the people it serves. These are principles that would ultimately help set a grander stage for design knowledge as whole, where the execution of architecture is motivated both by design value and community value alike.

THEORETICAL RESPONSIBILITY

If the origin of specialized knowledge resides primarily in the academic sphere, or at least in the theoretical sphere, it should be acknowledged that the problem of executing these ideas is not the only concern present in this analysis. Of course, the outline of this paper's argument is to position for better representation of different types of knowledge becoming more heavily emphasized in architectural education, but the stigma that arrives with relying on theoretical knowledge is one that requires an admittance of its faults.

Theoretical responsibility in this instance refers to the ability to digest abstract information while it coincides with a precedent of actionable consequence. The case studies presented here will attempt to outline both the positive and negative outcomes of working not only to embolden architectural social equity, but also use it effectively and with an understanding for sensitivities of the different communities it serves. What is meant to be demonstrated is that many designers faced with the challenges of understanding community-based or vernacular architectural problems would be less capable of solving those problems than should be acceptable. Part of the reasoning for the disparities extant in less economically privileged regions of the world can be reduced to the lack of adequate solutions provided in part by professionals in the field and in other parts by the locals or indigenous peoples of those groups themselves (Fernando 2009). Far too often, the most commonly suggested solution is the one that is not cost-efficient, culturally relevant, or inclusive of functionally driven motives. Instead, the emphasis is placed on creating a solution, though not one that overlaps public interest with a concise design paradigm.

While in other fields that deal heavily with implications of otherness and exclusion from the role of the practice itself, architecture may be one of the worst offenders. In "Des Espace Autres", an essay dealing in the explication of heterotopias and the development of unique community enclaves, Michel Foucault describes the spaces of the architect as illusory in the depiction of human life, or altogether "meticulous" and in contrast to the "ill-constructed" yet successful habitual expressions of the average, architecturally uninformed human being. This, too, has been discovered in common forms of vernacular architectural studies where the community itself is far more often benefited by existing, local knowledge on the function of normal human spaces (Shane 2005). Does it not seem problematic, then, that the role of the architect is so stipulated as an experience towards understanding that human interaction with physical forms, yet draws skepticism from those who create and design some of the world's most commonly used spaces?

This inquiry is not meant to completely disparage or make light of the role of architecture in our lives, but there is a special attention that should be paid to this discrepancy between the communities that presently do not see or experience the supposed benefits of its practice. In the examination of each case study, directives for understanding the nuances of architecture in these communities will become more clearly defined.

SOCIAL EQUITY IN ARCHITECTURAL STUDIES

In common architectural research, there is an intuitive desire to seek design responses from other designers themselves. What often goes missed in this dialogue is the focus of success based on the experience of the user animating the space. In this way, the notion of culturally interwoven solutions is within a margin of exclusivity that only few recognize. The unfortunate aspect of this reality is that architecture lacking intuition for those nuances tends to create negatively activated spaces (Noschi, N.d.), and in the realm of what can be called socially equitable, this ignorance toward localized themes and patterns fosters irreconcilable disparity.

Not only are the desires of the users forsaken for the will of the designer, or for misguided motivations, but the precedent that becomes established will only tend to encourage "disembodied" forms of future architectural characteristics (Noschis, N.d.). This form of dishonesty is one that promotes the antithesis of architecture's role in society, which is to be actionable and meaningful to the both the people who create the space, and the people who use it.

Social equity is about creating solutions set at a standard of benefiting all persons. Opportunities, though inevitably limited by socioeconomics, are meant to be equally created and distributed. The creation of space shares a similar

need. The simplest function requires sophistication in understanding both the station and movement of the body which inhabits it (Anderson 2014). Further, the opportunity for the phenomenon of remarkable architecture has less to do with the opulence of the space or the conveyed worth of its contents (Vellinga 2005), but of the feeling it provides and the psychological reaction of being within it. Here, designers should be constantly met with the challenge of creating a socially equitable opportunity for the spaces they design to generate feelings of closeness, awareness and an appropriate sociocultural response.

To consider the most valuable standard in this scenario, one looks not towards their fellow designer or architect, but to the people who are meant to live and breathe the space as a “functional adaptation” of their desire and personal conceptions of familiarity (Noschis, N.d.). In this way, the production of a space will only ever be successful, especially in developing regions where “architectural” knowledge can be scarce, and in conditions where each involved party has had revealed the potential of the expression and articulated those hierarchies accordingly.

The less architecture and, therefore, all built solutions attempt to restructure the values of the connected social spaces they shape, the more a framework for common successes in addressing poverty, educational access, and vital healthcare facilities can be generated as part of the culturally diverse notions expressed here. In this way, despite the “social production” of architecture remaining largely theoretical and query-based, we can begin to place new value on the people and identities that are most commonly affected (Anderson 4). This investment in average public opinion, no matter the region, holds more worth than any architect alone can achieve – an important lesson which may be currently underrepresented in the field.

LOCATIONS AND CONTEXT

KENYA

Kenya is located in Africa along the eastern coastal bank. It has incredibly varied climates and wildlife in addition to engaged and enlivened communities that rely largely on agriculture as a means toward livelihood and economic sustenance. Its intense political and social divides have challenged the ability of rural communities to provide common resources like drinking water, food and even homes for orphaned children. Specifically, in Mukuyuni, Kenya HIP Academy works as a medium not only for solving issues of educational disparity and access, but also serves to accommodate the aforementioned needs of the surrounding community.

In an attempt to provide for the people of the region, the school facility is used as a central hub for water filtration tanks, crops and safety. In a constant struggle against changing government standards for a campus of their kind, the architecture itself becomes ever-important. A proper foundation, washrooms and the simplicity of structural integrity are all aspects easily disregarded by the larger architectural community, but are needs not currently addressed by the means and resources available in Mukuyuni. This case study will strive to focus on the interpersonal decisions and struggles evident and unaddressed in their situation, which not only threatens to close their facility as a vital community service but also stands as one of the few solutions to understanding these vast theoretical problems prevalent in our architectural discourse.

NEPAL

Nepal is a country in South Asia that is rich with history, dynamic social relationships, brilliant culture and surprising architecture. While it contains beauty in these facets, it is also host to diverse systemic and infrastructural problems. These contribute directly to poor structural integrity in their buildings, lack of access to quality healthcare and especially less emphasis on educational initiatives that intend to educate their youth for the world around them. In many cases, newly graduated students and other citizens will leave the country to seek higher institutional instruction and will eventually return to contribute different realms of knowledge back into their communities.

A lack of critical analysis or research in these trends have made these problems difficult to combat (Bhusal, 2015), not only in Nepal but in other developing countries. As a result, this has contributed to the misappropriation of

resources that are meant to ensure that, 1) programs that address these issues are available and that, 2) that they are meeting the necessary requirements for people to succeed in advanced professional environments (universities, government, infrastructure, etc.). The motivation for this case study stems from a six-year ongoing partnership with a school director in the regions of Bageshwori and Narayanpur, Nepal and will act as a basis for the creation of increased awareness regarding the involvement of foreign special interest groups and their ideas about changing the world. What follows is a hope that these demonstrations will make evident the need to change our priorities about architecture as a whole.

CASE STUDIES

HIP ACADEMY, MUKUYUNI, KENYA – ASSESSING ARCHITECTURAL STRATEGY AND COMMUNITY RESPONSE

While the case study locations and instances themselves are decidedly based on educational access, it would be wrong to assume that architecture has little to do with this issue. In fact, architecture is such a broad public service that its involvement in the infrastructural issues of developing countries cannot be overstated, and it's not merely about the correct hybridization of successful city systems (Mitchell 2003). Examples in this fashion are innumerable, yet we remember the most significant events more easily. By merely paying attention to any one of the natural disasters that have torn communities apart in the past decade, it is easy to discern the role that buildings play in our lives and how crucial they are to facilitating basic human rights and needs (Howthorne 2011). What we rarely imagine, however, is that global service issues could be mitigated were the available architectural solutions to these problems more present and the designers themselves more involved at a basic level of understand which of these issues affect developing communities so deeply. Outside of homes themselves, schools and other forms of public service buildings are perhaps the most valuable forms of architecture available to the human population.

Recent developments in the monitoring of educational facilities in Kenya have demonstrated the nature of rural architectural performance quite clearly. Officials now inspecting schools for not only the quality of the facility but its ability to maintain certified teachers would present what one could imagine as a positive change for communities as a whole. The basic logic is that if higher standards are upheld, then the follow-through by each of the schools' respective directors would be one of ensuring the quality of these structures and how they interact with the local population. The problem, demonstrated by lack of access to expensive or otherwise non-locally sourced materials in addition to the fact that many of these institutions function on good will alone, is that the kinds of solutions available for issues of this magnitude are out of reach or simply not feasible in numerous capacities (Obs. 1A). While the integration of architectural understanding in a community like Mukuyuni, the problem goes far beyond the common practice of placemaking.

Not only is the concept of providing quality spaces challenged, but the ability to do so feels utterly distanced and estranged by an out-of-touch approach to what qualifies as adequate by both governmental guidelines and, simultaneously, fitting the actual needs of the community. The issue itself is less about criticizing the enforcement of these standards and more about figuring out how each end of the government-community spectrum can be balanced. This begs multiple questions: is it better to start over with entirely new structures; or, adapt what is currently available to fulfill each standard. The point of framing this as a multifaceted question can be demonstrated by the pros and cons of each, which respectively make attempts to address structural longevity and financial feasibility.

The estimated costs of establishing a new building with multiple classrooms and all necessary amenities comes in at about 100,000 USD based on assessments of the total footprint of the building, the number of levels and its material costs (Obs 1B). In a set of plan drawings and renderings supplied to my non-profit group and completed by an architect local to the Mukuyuni/Kimilili region of Kenya, it is not only clear that the design itself is largely utilitarian but also envisions patterns of growth. Each level would be treated as an expansion, with the foundation serving the ultimate purpose of making each structural move possible in the first place.

In an assessment of the design qualities and procedure, Livingstone Kegode (school director for HIP Academy), expressed his sentiments about what considerations took place for the planning of the new building:

“The architect visited the site and made a design that would not take up too much space, but also allows for expansion...laying the full foundation will be essential so that construction can be phased over time.”





Some simple expressions about architectural practice have ultimately had more to do with the actual functions of the building and its attractiveness (not necessarily aesthetically, but as a sustainable and progressive environment) as a place of employment for qualified teachers (Obs. 1C). In this way, the service of the building itself transcends its basic qualities as a space, attempting in multiple facets to establish relevance in all capacities.

The following excerpt from a dialogue with Frederick Manzugu, a HIP Academy instructor, explicates the government's role in establishing these conditions:

"...the directive was to ensure law and order is maintained in the education sector. Each and every one of us has to operate according to the law of the land. We surely have to put some order in our operations if we are going to salvage the education sector. [The building] has to align its operations to the standard operating procedures of schools in the country. ...the requirements are changing often, making our situation require fast assistance."

Livingstone further spoke on the severity of the issue and how it affects the community and school administrators:

"If we all try to achieve different things, then this will be a very hard directive for us to accomplish...thus we won't be offering our services to this community starting next year and if we do then the school administrator shall be arrested and face the law as per the education act."

While these issues in particular are closer to the hearts of those working directly with HIP Academy and its board of directors, they are meant to express the defined restrictions, consequences and results of informal and inaccessible forms of architecture. This is no fault of the community itself, who simply cannot fund these efforts on their own, but

of the larger design community and its place as an amalgamated service that is far too often distracted by its own principles and distinctions.

Referencing once again what we know about vernacular architecture, it is more important than ever to merge the common person creating a functional structure with their counterpart – the meticulous, otherizing designers of technologically advanced and economically developed communities. Of course, these frameworks are complicated to overlap, and in an acknowledgement for the criticisms of their individual placements included in this writeup, it is worth noting that the architectural community alongside the building knowledge of the common person is perhaps more merged than ever, but this does not discount the need to push the envelope further in terms of how these connections will manifest symbiotically in the future.

SHANTIDEEP ADARSH VIDHYASADAN (SAV) SCHOOL, BAGESHWORI, NEPAL – FULFILLING COMMUNITY NEEDS, ADDRESSING MATERIAL COMPLICATIONS AND LAND OWNERSHIP

Current research suggests that the difficulty in attaining successful education in Nepal is the foremost contributor to its citizens' entrenchment in poverty, which is only further exacerbated by the doubt most people harbor in relation to the government's current efforts to provide schooling (Nepal Freed, 2015). Govinda Panthy, director of the now-defunct SAV, further substantiated that most schools (including his own) have experienced periods of being largely understaffed, lacking in necessary materials or are subject to complicated leasing agreements responsible for limiting building access and the number of students who are able to attend (Obs. 2A). In alleviating not only the problem of access to adequate data proving the legitimacy of rural schooling, other amenable roadblocks include parents being unable to pay for existing programs, limited access to technology and fear that fluency in English is unattainable (Aryal, 2013) for the larger population. These issues point to a much larger problem in the region, which has to do with inflated statistical success of government-run education programs in larger metropolitan areas. The following article excerpts detail that juxtaposition to the success being seen in private, rural initiatives throughout the country:

"In 2004 the government launched an 814-million-dollar Education for All (EFA) initiative, which was expected to spark sweeping reforms. A 2009 evaluation of the programme lauded progress in enrollment, access and parity, but the overall quality of the system was judged to be "extremely disappointing", with a near total absence of mechanisms to monitor classroom environments and students' achievements."

– Mallika Aryal, Author, Inter Press Service, 2013

While these government programs are confirmed as failures, Nepal's educational community still struggles to adequately resource its most successful initiatives. Again, one may ask how these issues are tied to the role of architecture, and to paint the picture, we can not only reference the similar problems outlined by the Kenyan case study, but also the structural problems that came with SAV's facilities and their overall contribution to the problems at hand.

The patterns exhibited by this case study pointed to the difficulty of attaining funds to solve socioeconomic issues for SAV's student body while building reparations and inconsistent scheduling due to land lease complications would ultimately result in the ineffectiveness of various attempts at funding (Obs. 2B). Instead of investing in the facilities and ownership of the land for the school itself, Govinda and many other private school directors become responsible for fronting the costs of structural integrity issues and do so with a lack of support systems (Obs. 2C). Due to poor cooperation by regional and larger governmental jurisdictions, it is not only a lack of architectural development and integration that haunt these communities, but the lack of control over their own infrastructure which ultimately necessitates entirely new investments; not to mention that without the proper funding will then, too, fail.

Unfortunately, these suggestions about potential complication are based in reality. The SAV school experienced these issues in full, ranging from poor material usage resulting in crumbling walls during monsoon season and what would ultimately be the school's death knell – an ownership complication which required the school to be renamed, relocated and to serve an entirely different portion of the population (Obs. 2D). Some student testimonials demonstrated to us that the temporary nature of the school itself was not uncommon, and the fact that it stayed open from 1998 to about 2013 was ultimately surprising (Obs. 2E). Upon interview one student in particular, the need for support systems to help provide sustenance for successful private education became evident, and without the facilities or even the land to continue providing those services, many students will find themselves in the public school system where preparation for higher education and in-demand careers are much further out of reach (Aryal 2013).

“Without Govinda, I would not be getting my doctorate, I would not have a degree in bio-chemistry, I never would have stepped inside a school [...] His teaching has changed my life and continues to change the lives of so many children.”

– Saroj Kafle, former SAV student, interviewed 2015

Noting these difficulties and their prevalence in most developing communities and not without localized nuances, how does design ultimately interface with the kinds of overlapping social issues that complicate its successes or failures? The first acknowledgement to make is that design is, indeed, a factor even in the vernacular sense, where common knowledge and expertise act as the collective impetus for functional and utility-based motives. An ever-important function of that framework is that it requires the architect, or any other designer, to logically separate high design sensibilities from those that serve a more pragmatic purpose; and, more than ever, it is evident that this divide has been merged and unmerged in various ways since the practice of architecture became professionally designated.

In recognizing the SAV school for its successes, aesthetic and spatial quality would not be celebrated using conventional notions, but appreciating the value of vital community spaces and their sustained triumphs over time point to an aspect of extant building strategies oft not celebrated – those embedded with spirit instead of perfection; human resilience instead of structural nuance (Obs. 2F). These aspects are, arguably, the qualities that make even beautiful and sound spaces that much better and will help to frame the notion that meaning is consistently more present in those structures that serve such specific community purposes – how, then, are these the structures that receive less architectural attention? Further, how is it that developing and underserved communities are not consistently offered as both prime examples for practical understanding in tandem with the potential to resolve issues that are consistently present in a global scheme? If the academic sphere is to become more adequate in delivering real-world skills to its vastly increasing body of brilliant and engaged minds, then it should embrace the challenges of our society as an opportunity for actionable change as opposed to a disproportionate reverence for the hypothetical.

TRIPUR KINDER ACADEMY (TRIKA), DANG, NEPAL – VOLUNTOURISM, THE ENGAGEMENT OF FOREIGN ACTORS AND SUSTAINING DEVELOPMENT

One danger that comes with a call to action for globalized social justice efforts is the notion that only developed communities can offer to help to the “underdeveloped” regions of the world; or worse, those who would offer their help do not offer it for the sake of the beneficiaries, but in pursuit of their personal satisfactions. Travel and research in capacities that attempt to clarify global disparities and social issues are worthy, but as noted in numerous journals and recent studies about individual or organizational involvement in other countries, demonstrations of mishandling these directives are more common than ever (Obs. 2G). A particular portion of the issue is that communities harboring deep infrastructural issues that lead to many of the problems outlined in this essay also offer impulsive and

reactionary persons a chance to sustain negative constructs and dispositions by contributing to their overall existence unintentionally. Without a proper personal identity and motive for involvement in these communities, many are not prepared for the personal upheaval they may feel when faced with deep systemic issues, and risk further embedding their own, potentially incorrect, perceptions even further into their mindsets (DoMarco, et. al. 2013). If architecture is to fully embrace the community of the world, rather than segregate forms of architecture per their localized designations, it must also anticipate the kinds of research and the overall approach that will be necessary to effectively operate in these new overlaps of professional and individual practice.

The decisions that arrive with this criterion are often not easy, which became evidenced when Govinda (formerly directing the SAV School) chose to relocate because of the aforementioned leasing complications. The goal became to focus on providing educational service to a new community, one with an indigenous population that had previously struggled with access to early childhood education. In doing so, land was to be used that was already owned in his family and the new school would require new construction entirely (Obs. 2H). This school would be referred to as the Tripur Kinder Academy, or TriKA, as reference to its service of three village developments in the Dang district, located about twelve hours away from the original school in Bageshwori.

In an attempt to both fundraise for the school and construct it, Govinda sought to partner multiple organizations who had been involved in sustaining the SAV School and combined their efforts so that his instruction could begin in the new location. Working of their own directives, one of these organizations chose to send a large team to work on both constructing the school and learning about the community it serves. While originally propositioned as a cost-effective means for deeper social engagement, the outcomes were not as envisioned. The effort cost at least 40,000 USD overall, where 22,000 USD was used for the purchase of construction materials and the remaining amount put toward travel expenses and other miscellanea (Obs. 2I). The great disparity in this scenario deals with the amount of waste accounted for in an effort to globalize the experience for young students in a university setting. Nearly half of the budget amount raised is lost to the kind of compensation that becomes necessary when individuals who are unexperienced in construction, Nepali culture and the overall worth of the efforts involved were expected to complete the task (Obs. 2J). This method irresponsible on behalf of the organization attempting to offer aid, and also contributed to complications that would arise later when additional classrooms were to be added to accommodate new students. Witnessing this development unfold offered an immense amount of perspective towards the issues outlined by most who evaluate the voluntourism industry. It is, perhaps, not always bad to engage groups in different parts of the world by offering a travel component in addition to one that offers real-world experience in something like construction, but it is clear that most organizations are yet unaware of how these kinds of practices should be directed.

One supposition that can be offered in this capacity comes from the personal observations of our own team, who traveled after the school was constructed – one year after the previously mentioned organization had traveled to participate in construction. Our initiative was to travel, pay the families we stayed with for housing and to ultimately outweigh the costs of our own expenses by bringing materials along that could stay with the school and the students to sustain their education (Obs. 2K). Further, we participated in community surveying, demographic studies and data collection for the purpose of better understanding our efforts and the needs being addressed. Some of the materials our team left behind included water filtration devices, electricity generators, technology for video conferencing, various articles of clothing, cameras and 3D printed artifacts from classroom partnerships in the United States totaling up to about 5,000 USD. Not only were the costs of our personal travel expenses offset, but the immense amounts of information we learned from participating with the community in ways that were within a feasible capacity was largely beneficial for both our organization and TriKA. Before leaving, a colleague and myself were additionally able to survey the next plot of land available for construction which began around six months after our departure. While this method was not without its flaws, especially in learning about data collection and human subjects research, its benefits reached both sides of the equation and helped create future fundraising for the school's lunch program and overall student capacity. When construction for the additional classrooms was set to begin, the organization donated funds both for the materials and for hiring local labor (Obs. 2L). To observe patterns of

sustainable vernacular solutions, this method saved immensely on the costs of our own involvement in the construction process and still allowed us to gather an understanding for material costs and a breakdown of fluctuations in material costs associated with natural disaster following the 2015 earthquake in the country.



One of the most valuable aspects of understanding the demographic makeup of TriKA had much to do with gaining a community-based understanding for the issues they face. Common questions we asked included:

- Why did you choose to send your child to TriKA?
- Were there other options available to you, and why were they less desirable?
- What difficulties do you face in getting your child to school on a day-to-day basis?
- What do you want your child to gain from attending school at TriKA?

While answers did vary from family to family, most of them answered with an appreciation for the fact that TriKA offered food, clean water, English instruction and cognitive engagement for their young children (Obs. 2M). Many of them also face difficulties at home dealing with a multitude of issues, and TriKA offers a chance for their children to live better and healthier lives than they would otherwise have the opportunity to experience. It was further noted that sustaining the future development of the school would hinge on continuing to provide the necessities outlined by the parents and that no commitments could be made if the capacity to offer these services was not present. Fortunately, this set in motion and helped shape the future directives of the organization and helped set a precedent for the value of multidisciplinary coalitions of the population working together in the appropriate overlaps and distinctions. Above all, allowing localized experts and knowledgeable individuals to handle the decision-making is still very clearly the most mutually beneficial and ethical means for proceeding with international aid efforts in the realm of crucial infrastructures like education.

By outlining the idea that the agency of global change has much to do with the combining of cultures, ideologies, conceptions of being and other cosmopolitan ideations into actionable solutions. While the ideas outlined here should be left to as much scrutiny and any other, the inspiration for this writing stems from an aspect of attempting to mitigate the challenges of social engagement, especially in a time where it has become easier to talk about issues rather than do anything about them.

Though the call to overlap people from different walks of life and levels of experience is one that has helped create an active discourse about the actions of individuals working to understand the issues that influence our society as a whole, it is often easy to forget that the theoretical knowledgebase for these ideas can only do so much. To hem these fringes of the so-called societal fabric, we must constantly evaluate our efforts against the consequences they bring.

A MOMENT IN TIME

Given an admittance of bias and personal experience being prevalent, I felt it would be prudent to share a diary entry during my travel experiences in Nepal. My hope is that it would help to demonstrate the profundity of the experience and the lasting impression it offered, regardless of the analysis provided previous to this entry. Given its context to an intimate and surreal time in my life, I would also desire that this helps offer context to my perspectives and growth within them since that time. Most of the writing that took place during the travel experience was informal and stream of consciousness, making this particular entry an emotional one at the time of jotting down the basic thought pattern.

We're learning incredible things in this country. Part of the joy of traveling to a place that you've never been before is how vastly things might differ from your normal surroundings. I don't think that any of us really expected to see as much of Nepal as we did in such a short period of time during our drive from Kathmandu to Narayanpur. Totalling about 10 hours, the trip had us straddling mountainsides on narrow roads, driving through isolated communities, bigger cities and more rural or vegetated areas alike. At times, one might have mistaken the more forested locales for a familiar pass through the Ozarks in Arkansas. In other moments, complete bewilderment set in as we attempted to appreciate and absorb the newness of the land before us.

What you process almost immediately is a sensory need to observe quickly. Things move fast, here. Be it the traffic, a bustling market area or the constant variation of geographical nuances, the viewer becomes immersed in a desire to understand as much as possible at an impossible rate. One becomes obsessed with knowing what cannot be known without spending a considerable amount of time in any of these passing regions; and so, each fleeting glance becomes a missed opportunity.

Fortunately, our destination was a place where we would reside for three weeks, persistent in its call for exploration. Narayanpur has given us a unique look at this fascinating country and its beautiful landscapes. Located in the Western Terai region, we are actually in what is considered a valley. Surrounding us are what might be called mountains at home, while here they are referred to as hills, dwarfed by the true enormity of the Himalayas beyond. Being surrounded by an incredible spread of agriculture, indigenous peoples and the specific vernacular of their buildings has ultimately shown us what foreigners rarely have the fortune to witness: a region almost completely devoid of tourism, existing as naturally as it would without our presence or

documentations.

The cities of Nepal sprawl outward in major linear directions from central hubs. Larger cities have multiple hubs while the grand scheme of Kathmandu fulfills this extrapolation at the highest level. Street shops run into one another as products and different venues cascade throughout each street in an expanse of vision. People wait for buses, socialize, move amongst one another. Alleyways feel eerily familiar while the buildings that rise around them are entirely alien. Rebar sticks out from unfinished structures, leaving opportunity to add whenever someone deems it appropriate. Some facades reflect the vibrant colors we have already encountered in the culture here, while others employ artificial glazing or plain grey tones.

In many neighborhoods, houses use gates to divide public from private. A journey inside feels sacred; a movement from the open unknown to the welcome warmth of a home and a family inside. A hospitality resides here that I have yet to experience in any facet back home. Friendly visitors arrive without warning and are invited inside with no hesitation. Inside the gates, one may notice that the surrounding walls have been secured with a brutal security scheme as the pointed ends of nails protrude from cemented bricktops. Inside, we are immediately offered a place to rest and refreshment in the form of tea or, sometimes, a cold Coca-Cola.

The streets themselves move back and forth between notions of sidewalk, driveway and drainage systems – notions that are, at times, loosely defined. Large holes often appear to test the vigilance of a foreign face. Children run and play outside of shops, mothers sit on porches keeping watch or chatting with neighbors. Community is real. It's palpable and indivisible. These cities breed spirit, sometimes in the face of despair.

On long walks we venture away from the typical arrangement of open storefronts or living spaces that are crammed together in admirable solidarity. Beyond, roads lead to villages and outlying communities that are worlds unto themselves. With over 100 different ethnic groups and at least 90 variations of language, one does not venture far before experiencing different nuances of culture. Following side roads, these communities align themselves with the natural movement of people in and out of the region. Every moment of discovery bestows its own point of reflection; a persistent need to continuously remain aware.

What each large city, small town, village and isolated community brings are those prolonged opportunities to stand and observe moments that will never exist again. Back home, these things feel monotonous and plain. Here, quality of life stems from the traditions of family and community that hold each human hub together. While neighbors in the United States bicker about whose tree branches are hanging into the other's yards, citizens here gather both inside and out in regular and genuine humanity; homes represent collective existence. The places we've visited and lived within over the last two weeks remind us that there are perspectives worth harnessing and holding onto forever. The people in these locations have taught me more about happiness than I've ever learned from the ideals of "success" we strive for at home, and while there are things that I

undoubtedly miss about my origins, I think that we'll all return with a new reverence for our common person; an appreciation for these places and people that have imparted so much.

There is no way to properly summarize the general feelings I've had since we arrived. The last three years have challenged me in ways I never imagined. At times, I have worked through depression and moments of stress that made life feel impossible. In anticipation of leaving this place, I am attempting to collect my thoughts. The places and people before us are changing the way I view my personal self and the lives of those around me.

They are revolutionizing my sense of existence and I now encounter a struggle in composing the words meant to describe what all of this has been. So much can be experienced in a very short period. By the time we return home, it may feel as though everything passed in an instant, but the people stepping off of that plane will not be the same people who left at the beginning of June. That's something that we are all thankful for.

Upon a reflection of that particular writeup, I can further acknowledge my own naivety as a crucial component in understanding the outliers of one's personal perspective. In retrospect, one almost always seems naïve, but in this honesty there is an objective clarity about the intent of the mind and its placement in this scheme of analysis and evaluation.

When emotions infiltrate our desires to understand complex issues, we become sentimental and even those heartfelt moments of contemplation and consideration for the experience itself can feel undermined when serious issues plague the very places that have caused such a response. However, the value of these imparted notions cannot and should not be forgotten. This idea reflects my own position about the placement of our being in unfamiliar spaces.

CONCLUSIONS

There is an unfortunate necessity in capturing even these words as ephemeral portions of the process of discourse. While the ideas expressed here are largely about the evaluation and subsequent criticism of architectural education and its lack of integration with global systemic issues, its emphasis should instead be imparted as a singular instance of the analytical and research-based processes taking place in the field of architecture.

To move forward in a society that has begun its inevitable overlap, though haphazardly, the social and theoretical responsibilities present offer opportunities for new policies, paradigms and movements that help to effect positive global consequence (Bell 2010). In particular, the idea of social engagement is moving beyond mere proposition and finds itself launching into a sphere of execution and tact never before observed, or perhaps never fully appreciated. With the correct means of institutional endorsement and a shift in academic emphasis there is great potential to move beyond hypothesis and theory.

Where an opportunity for such vast change can be envisioned it is ever more important to focus on the nuances and details that lead and build toward larger shifts in architecture, rather than exacting forces that attempt to reckon and reshape its propensities entirely (Noschis N.d.). In this way, our personal demonstrations of these ideas are meant as small, incremental portions of the exchange where students, professors and professionals alike can seek to better attune themselves to the relevant strategies necessary for evolutions in not architecture alone, but in all social engagement capacities. This stands to benefit the placement of the professional in a sphere of acknowledgement

towards the genius of the common person and to celebrate a unification of knowledge bases that are far too often left untouched.

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NOTES

Field notes taken by the author during demographic surveys and investigations of educational needs from each community case study will be communicated and noted accordingly to differentiate from scholarly sources as follows:

HIP Academy, Kenya – Observation 1, parts A-Z: (Obs. 1A)

SAV School/TriKA, Nepal – Observation 2, parts A-Z: (Obs. 2A)

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