

Pursuing responsible architecture

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It's been argued that no form of art can so fundamentally impact the lives and aspirations of man and society as the art of architecture and planning.

In the UAE, achievers, within the community of architects and planners, have earned their place in the development of this young nation. In Dubai, government agencies have by and large entrusted them with the task of shaping environments within a set of guidelines and controls while the society has recognised their responsible role for improving the quality of living environment and the lives of citizens.

As the city grows to become one of the most prosperous and thriving cities in the world, the burden of responsibility amongst these achievers becomes even greater as the local environment becomes a fertile land for innovation and sustainability. While responsible architecture continues to develop, man aspires to higher standards of expectations of lifestyle, comfort and technology.

The tapestry of architects practicing in the UAE with their diverse cultural

and educational backgrounds brings with it a diverse set of expectations, skill sets and sense of awareness, responsibility and affiliation to the profession. In the absence of a professional body in the UAE, it is yet to be seen how this vast range of diversity can remain coherent and seamless to produce environments fit for all, while respecting the sense of identity within collective responsibilities of the profession.

Professional bodies for architects, in the line of the RIBA in the UK or the AIA in the US, are equipped with legislative powers and entrusted by society to protect the architect who is assuming vast responsibilities with increasing liabilities. It is no secret that the architectural profession in the UAE needs to be safeguarded to ensure the sustainability of this precious form of art that is the custodian of the environment, which in turn impacts a person's quality of life and their aspirations for better quality living and built environments.

The model of success of the development and growth of the city of Dubai may present an interesting debate for institutions like the RIBA or AIA to explore and examine how architects and planners from diverse cultural and education backgrounds can indeed practice locally without a regulatory legislative body. Even in the dynamic and vibrant environment of the UAE, architects, with an ever growing sense of responsibility attached to their practice, still manage to evolve, think and produce noteworthy settlements and urban environments, all within the legislative and compliance mechanisms of the local government and development

agencies, albeit without a professional body to guide or protect them.

It therefore follows that in such competitive environments and tight scrutiny for pursuit of excellence, local architects and architectural firms are left with no choice but to enhance their skill sets and pursue creative and responsible architecture whether for a humble small building or large scale iconic projects.

In a debate about responsible architecture, I once asked Mr. Paul Tange, (chairman of TANGE Associates) about sustainable architecture and how his firm practises it. He replied that his practice has continued the legacy of his father, the late Kenzo Tange, who maintained that sustainable architecture is all about responsible architecture, and responsible architects will ultimately produce responsible environments.

Dubai has provided a fertile land for architects, planners and thinkers to be creative and innovative and hence it is only right that architects and architectural firms should equally be aware that they have a responsible role to ensure that quality architecture and design is indispensable at any level of the practice, and that buildings or structures should not be allowed to occupy space in this city unless vetted and tested beyond the level of municipal approvals.

As society becomes more sophisticated in its demands, it expects accountability. Dubai has now matured to a stage where architects should demonstrate their sense of responsibility to produce responsible architecture, notwithstanding the absence of the governance of a local professional body.