

## **Architect's role in Rural Community Development.**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to evaluate the role of the architect in community development. Communal existence is possible only when certain individuals agree to live together in a geographical area with a sense of growth and development in creating a sustainable community. Architects on the other hand need to integrate sustainability as a major consideration for community development. The role of architects as professionals can be defined as a process to preserve, improve, and create the required quality of the built environment under the particular condition of each community. In the rural setting there is usually undefined precedence of development, therefore preparation for a sustainable built environment is often neglected; hence the architect has a role to play in rural community development. This paper therefore identify and consider ways in which architects can play their professional roles and thus act towards community sustainability. It suggests principles on which architects can base their actions in sustainable community development. Information were gathered from case studies, useful literature materials such as books, magazines, journals and the internet was also very instrumental and was consulted in the course of the study in descriptive method of analysis based research. An overview of the role of architects was employed related to realization of their roles and responsibility, personal self-improvement, professional and citizen actions for a sustainable community, and collaborative development. Although architects' role in sustainable community development can vary with the particular situation, their actions as professionals and citizens always overlap. The paper finally concludes that in order to fortify the role of architects and policies for sustainable community development, there is a need for continual motivation, growth and development. It recommended that personal and joint efforts is required in order to collaborate with concerned authorities and agencies in the design, planning, and building of the rural communities for sustainable rural community.

**Keywords:** Architect, Community, Development, Sustainability.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Sustainable community development involves a holistic view of community, embracing nature, culture, and politics, as well as economy. These issues are temporal and complex with multiple possible outcomes. However, it is clear that the level of sustainability is linked to activities in the community. Each individual has the responsibility through their own actions to shape the community and its future. This means development begins at the individual level. Because people both live in a specific community as well as in the natural world, as is recognized in all communities around the world which use 'sustainable community' as a benchmark (Barton, 2000; Pease, 1993), a sustainable community can never evolve if community members ignore the relationship between man and community, as well as man and nature. Apart from community members, the built environment is also a fundamental component of every community. The works of the architecture profession, which vary from design to planning, obviously support the physical development of a community. As professionals, architects have the responsibility through their own actions for the creation of the community of which they are a part or with which they work. The relationships between people and place, as well as between people are basic concerns for architects. However, the influence architects have over community development is dependent on their position relative to it. Architects who live in a community where they do not have a chance to create any built environment have to use the built environments created by other architects and can only be influential as citizens of the community. At the same time, they will be acting as professionals and then their practices affect people beyond the geographical boundaries of the community in which they live.

Community development is described as advancement in the standard of communal existence. It can also be defined as the change or growth of a community over a period of time so that it becomes more advanced, impressive, successful, stronger, or complete. Development is understood as a process of quantitative and qualitative changes in the desired direction. Thus, not all changes taking place in rural areas can be read as signs of development. The question arises: how beneficial are these changes? Often there are difficulties in selecting the criteria for assessment of suitability of the direction of change process. This implies that the pattern of community development is dependent on the visions and actions of community members, and the circumstances. While urban communities have shown rapid development to become larger, more intensive, or more complex, some rural communities have preserved (sustained) their traditional pattern of living over many years. The modern meaning of sustainable community development' has come to signify the changes that move a community towards sustainability.

Rural areas are often thought of as the bastion of tradition, immutability, agricultural mono-functionality, and constancy. Changeability and development are connoted with industrialization, and urbanisation. But this is only a long--time outdated archetype. Such an approach refers to the scale and pace of changes considered from various perspectives of functions of rural areas, the widespread instability, which is typical of post-modern, times (Halamska, 2012). Basically these changes relate to attempts to maintain or sustain the ecosystem rather than the modern view that development relies on growth whatever the environmental cost. The phrase also describes development moving from a less sustainable condition to a more sustainable situation, or so-called 'weak' to 'strong' sustainability (Crane & Ramage, 2000).

Accordingly, the roles of architects in sustainable community development can be fundamentally part of the process to stimulate community movement from 'weak' to 'strong' sustainability. Architects need to integrate the concept of sustainable practices in their roles. Although they might begin by attempting to balance the value systems of economic, social, and ecological factors ('weak' sustainability), and the final goal should be the creation of a condition where ecological factors are the overarching system (strong sustainability). This paper is an investigation of the roles of architects in sustainable community development. It is based on analysis of ideas from the literature related to sustainable architectural practices and behaviours. The aim is to show what could and should happen if there is a real move towards making a sustainable world. The roles of architects are first divided into categories. The first category is about the actions of architects that are working in the profession, and is mainly about improvement of existing and creation of sustainable built environments. The second deals with the responsibility of being a citizen in the places in which architects live.

As members of a community, architects have to communicate and have contact with many people as they meet, talk, trade, provide, or obtain services, or become involved in activities with others. Generally, people with a greater sense of personal responsibility and strong attitudes towards sustainability are more likely to engage in sustainable behaviours and practices (Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Similarly, architects who realize their roles and responsibility in creation of sustainable community tend to embrace concern for their actions and their effects on social and ecological systems in a community, and participate in maintaining the sustainability of the community or in helping a community develop towards a more sustainable condition. In the community in which they live, the advantages of their actions, such as appropriate aesthetics, comfort, lower operating costs, or strong community relationships, can directly improve their and other community members' quality of life. In the case where they work for other communities, besides enhancing

sustainable conditions in those communities, because the relationship between communities can support the sustainable situation of all communities, the advantages realized will come back to the community in which they live. Besides the direct benefits from their actions, their exemplary roles can be models for other followers. To strengthen architects' awareness of their roles and responsibility, other people and organizations in the society should promote the necessities and advantages of this change for architects and the environment. This can subsequently shape the patterns of individual behaviours and professional practices.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Current researches have shown that any programme(s) and policy that is meant for the people must involve them at all stages of the project or programme, from the initiating stage to the stage of implementation and evaluation. The Humanistic approach to rural development one would say is a brilliant idea because it appeals to human consciousness. As an approach for educating and mobilizing rural people the instruments for mobilization as past experiences have shown, has been subjected to many abuses. The demand on the built environment to support users' activities leads clients to hire architects to design or plan. In turn, their practices respond to both clients' and users' needs and affect the users' emotions and actions. Moreover, in the design and construction process, architects have to work with other professionals, such as engineers, specialists, developers, and builders. Bradshaw (2008) notes, "Place communities such as rural small towns are typically heralded as model communities where social cohesion rules—strong patterns of social interaction based on long-lasting and deep personal relations" (p. 6). Rural communities are also perceived to be at risk, threatened by the forces of progress, modernization, and technology as well as by the economy. This depiction is nothing new, for the rural community has been said to be in crisis for some time. Because the creation of a built environment consumes energy and resources and also affects immediate and more distant environments, architects also have responsibility through their actions for changes that could happen to ecological features and systems. Since environmental issues, such as depletion of natural resources, can occur both close to and far from home, architects impact on larger systems than those to which they belong. A framework or action plan should be suited to the situation and depend on community-based decisions. Consensus decision-making can create more effective plans and actions. Because participation can give some sense of ownership and some degree of control (Alexander et al., 1975; Hubner et al., 2005; Sanoff, 2000), this process can assist people in realizing their responsibilities and encourage them to act for developing their

community. When architects are involved in the planning and decision-making, they would realize their own responsibility and act properly in both professional and citizen roles, such as participating as a citizen in the design of their environment.

The architect's responsibility, thus, is not only the health and safety of anyone using their design products, but also extends to affect their creations on the environment at both local and global levels. Although every architect could participate in the move to sustainability in all the communities in which they are involved, both as a professional and a citizen, not all recognize their ability or are concerned about the effects of their actions on society and ecology. To bring architects a step closer to understanding the way to act for community sustainability, this section proposes principles for advancing their potential and practice (Chansomsak & Vale, 2007). Because architects have to cope with many issues that affect their decision-making and actions and their actions are also associated with multi-stakeholders, the suggested principles have been organized into two groups; personal performance and collaborative performance. The first group places a focus on actions that architects can do by themselves independent of external factors. The principles in this group are prerequisites that an architect should meet before dealing with other people. They include realization of their roles and responsibility as well as personal self-improvement.

### **3. THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECT**

The role of Architects in community development goes beyond designs, documentation, execution, or supervisions, Architects can provide an overview of issues related to the project or offer experience in a specialized field (Day, 2003). Because architects have the ability to understand the consequences of the design process (McCamant et al., 1994), and can think spatially (Day, 2003), they can advise and educate local people on any additions or improvements to their physical environment. Their knowledge and experiences can assist the community in their decisions and initiatives.

Furthermore, because the community consists of many stakeholders, the actions of architects should not only be limited to the rich and powerful, but should also extend to ordinary people or even people with limited opportunities, such as low-income or homeless people. Meanwhile, the voluntary sector, in which citizens join together to undertake some particular task with no personal financial gain outside the government framework, can be an alternative client for architects to work with in the community (Wates & Knevitt, 1987). This is also true of other community development groups, such as housing cooperatives, development trusts, and special groups that come together for

community projects such as making a community centre, playground or streetscape. Although architects' actions are primarily related to social systems, the effects of their actions, including inputs and outputs from their activities and behaviours and the impact of their built environment creations, relate to environmental issues. As a result, architects' actions in both citizen and professional roles are dominantly part of social systems. As in the first step, architects can share their knowledge, skills and experience in the planning and action process. When conducting planning or other activities, a third step of evaluation and review should be carried out. Architects who take part in a working group can participate in making decisions about evaluation and choosing appropriate methods. They can collect and analyze information and present the results. Data from an evaluation should provide an indication of what direction should be taken and be used for reviewing the whole process from visioning, planning and acting, to evaluating. The knowledge of past successes can give the group confidence to establish new projects and it helps to encourage more people to become involved in the group and community activities (ORTEE, 1994).

Architects should improve their knowledge about strategies for sustainable design. They should know how to gather relevant information for environmental and cultural considerations. Post-occupancy evaluation (POE) which can reveal accomplishments or mistakes, is another critical source of knowledge (Lord, 2001; Roaf et al., 2004; Van der Voordt & Van Wegen, 2005). POE can be used by architects to evaluate programmes as well as design. This information provides data that can help avoid potential errors and select better solutions for new built environments or the refurbishment of existing facilities. Furthermore, architects should be familiar with environmental impact assessment (EIA), life cycle assessment (LCA), building rating systems (e.g. LEED and BREEAM) and environmental regulations in each region (Hengrasmee, 2005; Hyde et al., 2007; Martin, 2001). These design tools and techniques should be selected appropriately and accommodated in every phase of architectural design. The information on inputs, outputs, and impacts that can occur in the production of building elements, transportation and storage, site modification and construction, operation, modification and maintenance, reuse, recycling, removal, demolition, recovery, and site rehabilitation, are the basics for designing and planning sustainable built environments. Many of these parameters are outside the normal sphere of the architectural design process. Moreover, architects should also increase their understanding of the environmental performance of buildings, materials, systems and construction, meaning they must be familiar with how buildings work, not just with what they look like.

Furthermore, skills in communication, clarification of values, conflict resolution, and careful analysis are required. This is for dealing with not only clients and users, but also

other experts or consultants. Consensus or participation techniques (Day, 2003; Sanoff, 2000), such as awareness methods, group interaction, brainstorming, game simulation, workshops, public forums, and charrettes, can be used for collecting data as well as educating and training participants to create change in their environments.

Architects have to live somewhere; inevitably they are members of the community they live in. The architects can advise and educate local people in any additions and improvements to their built environment. The local people can share their knowledge, but it is limited and based on the circumstantial experiences which are not always enough. Hence, the input from an architect is necessary. The knowledge and experience of architects can assist the community in their decisions and initiatives (Chansomsak & Vale 2009). Similarly, owing to their actions in creating the physical elements of a community or working for a community, they also have a role in community development. To drive sustainable community development the roles of architects, therefore, are not only as those of being professionals but also of being community members. Unfortunately, the role of an architect as citizen of a community is usually overlooked. This is fundamentally because of lack of realization of the role, lack of skills and opportunity to participate in community development, and discouragement from participation by local organizations (Chansomsak, 2005; Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy [ORTEE], 1994).

Architects should be involved in the sustainable community development process<sup>55</sup> and facilitate communities to reach decisions related to care for the local environment, even though they are not directly involved in design or planning of a particular community scheme. This process has been described as a whole process, with the cycle going from visioning to revision (Environs Australia, 1999; Maser, 1997; ORTEE, 1994). In brief, the process of sustainable community development could happen through such actions as: building partnership and setting the vision, planning and acting, evaluating and revising the visions, and plans and actions. In each process, architects could share their knowledge and skills to support decision making and actions. Quantitative and qualitative changes within individual functions of rural areas and interrelations between them picked up great speed after the system changed, especially after Poland's accession to the European Community. The scale and scope of changes in rural areas vary in space and as regard respective functions. The clarity of these changes is also diverse. Multi-functionality of rural areas, considered in the context of their development follows from coherence of the multifunctional development of a farm, agriculture and rural areas as a whole, in connection with the idea of sustainable development of the country. Rural areas cover over 90% of the country's area and agriculture uses only ca. 60% of the surface; hence development of these areas is not only

development of agriculture (Wilkin 2010). Economic functions and more broadly – economic functions of rural areas, do not refer solely to agricultural, forestry or fish production. The diversity of economic activity in rural areas clearly increases and the spatial range of these functions is highly varied, at the same time.

To strengthen the ability to behave as stewards, architects should also enhance their potential for self-sufficiency. They should try to cut down their daily expenses especially for excessive items, work with honesty and moral integrity, cease selfish competition and taking advantage of others, behave with morality, and abstain from all greed (Chaipattana Foundation, 1999). Moreover, they can use self-reliant techniques, such as food-growing, and energy production, in their homes. Meanwhile, greening private spaces, sharing facilities and maintenance of public services and common property could be practiced to facilitate the move to a self-sufficient community, doing such things themselves, they can encourage others, such as relatives or friends, to do the same. The first step, initial action, could mean setting up a working group and meetings. For an effective result, this working group should consist of representatives from multi-stakeholders. Apart from their regular work, architects can work as volunteers for the community. Their roles can be as part of a group, participating in discussions with other community members. To collect a wide range of information, each member should have an equal chance to present their opinions and share them with others. Architects, given their education, should respect others, understand and accept what people believe and practice, and agree on the right of participation (Maser, 1997).

Human relationship, communication, and participation skills are required. These skills can reduce misunderstandings and conflicts as well as create a sense of community. When the community members have good relationships, they will extend their self-interest to care about other community members and sometimes even the wider society. As suggested by Maser et al. (1998), good communication means “respect for both listener and speaker, because one must first listen to understand and then speak to be understood.” Being a good communicator, each person should respect others when sharing knowledge and ideas to create better understanding and better solutions for their community. Agreement is reached through a process of sharing information and vision, discussion, integrating the ideas, and developing consensual problem-solving (Roseland, 2000). Accordingly, consensus decision-making is one recommended method of concluding discussion (Day, 2003; Roseland, 2000). This method does not mean that the solution has the full agreement of everybody, but rather that there is no substantial disagreement (Roseland, 2000). Nor does it mean compromising, which means abandoning or deprioritizing the needs, or voting, when sometimes the right of the majority ignores the needs of the minority and leads to confrontation between groups.

Although architects may not be members of a working group, they can still help in profiling the community. Their experience can be part of information gathering in evaluation of the community situation. They should cooperate in community surveys, answer questionnaires and interviews, and attend public meetings. In the case where architects live in the community, they can see problems and challenges more clearly. Information gathered will help working groups or organizations that work with the community in understanding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and obstructions in the present situation, which can be a key to developing sustainable actions.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the professional role of architects in sustainable community development can be defined as a process of preserving, improving and creating the required quality of built environment under the particular condition of each community along with professional development to enhance such practices. It is obvious that the integrated approach to planning rural communities means a combination of a general plan for rural areas and a detailed plan for rural settlements. Each community member has different roles and responsibilities, depending on their position and experience. Each role interlinks and supports others. Because architects typically have particular knowledge and experience in designing and planning, their skills can assist sustainable community development in creating physical amenities. The basic role of architects, as true of all community members, is as a steward of natural resources. Conservation methods, such as reuse or recycling of materials and water, should be part of their daily lives. For instance, they can reduce their domestic water use by recycling grey water for washing cars and watering the garden. They should maintain their appliances to extend their useful life and efficiency. Planting a garden, whatever the size, and caring for it can make a support for native flora and fauna and create more pleasant and livable places. For more effective cooperation, architects should reduce their 'traditional' ego and try to listen to and understand the values and opinions of others. Because there is no absolute step-by-step solution, architects have to choose and apply their knowledge and skills as fits the particular situation. For example, even though appropriate technologies, dependent on the place, local supply, labor skills, and time availability, are preferable solutions, architects have to define the most appropriate solutions under the constraints of the project (including economic constraints) and conditions of the community. Architects' decisions will also depend on their own values and how they relate these to the community. To lead architects' decisions to become more sustainable, a responsibility for society and environmental ethics should be developed. Along with knowledge and skills, architects must improve their professional ethics and use sustainable development as the objective

of their actions. However, each individual role is only a part of the whole picture, as only participation and community unity in pursuing the same common goal creates whole community development. Hence an architect should not act alone but should participate in community activities and use his or her potential in facilitating communities to reach the sustainable condition.

In summary, The Integrated Rural Plan should come as a result of coordinating development interests and the possibility of using land in rural areas and rural settlements. This plan should provide time and financial compatibility in its natural surroundings and adequate community and economic conditions. A special advantage of this new approach is in the possibility of aggregation of land use data from the plot level to larger area units (i.e. settlement, area, sub-district, and district) in the process of production, as well as in the process of their implementation, monitoring and review.

Countryside and villages are the parts of natural environment, which is a condition for their existence and development. Community and economic factors only reflect the tempo of that development. Planning how to use agricultural, forest and built-up land must be treated together. Using any of these three sorts of land shouldn't have a negative effect on the other two sorts, as well as on the whole environment. All planned interventions in the area (zoning, sub-division, construction, production) should be mutually coordinated and subordinated to space, community and economic development of the whole rural community (countryside and settlements) and to improvement of environmental quality and living conditions of the total rural population. The impacts of the architect in the development of a rural community is a progressive directional master plan of the community that employs historical occurrences, prevailing present conditions, and proposed future development.

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