AESTHETICAL PERCEPTION: CONCEPTUAL REALISATION IN DESIGN STUDIO

Ar. Asif R Khan

Associate Professor and Head of Department, Al Salama Institute of Architecture, Perinthalmanna, Kerala, India.
ar.asif.k@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Architects tend to generalise the approach towards realisation of built form in architecture as the spatial imprinting of human behaviour in a way that persist as a form while allowing for further and more developed interactions. However it is observed that an ordinary individual tries to associate himself with a piece of architecture by considering the aesthetic values as well as novelty of characteristics in the built environment under review. Aesthetic as a conception is traditionally rich and varied. Various thinkers have continued to interpret the rational meaning of aesthetics and its relevance to human existence. In modern-day context researchers have tried to enquire about the activities involved in having an aesthetic experience. This is often related to the understanding of the cognitive response system. In relation the appraisal of built environment is more intriguing and complex. For a built environment to be identified as being a piece of architecture and aesthetically pleasing there should be some attributes that lead us to this interpretation. Attributes which convey meaningfulness to the structure while appraisal is being done. In order to achieve this objective the architect usually endows his work consciously with such properties that instantaneously aids in establishing a semiotic interact or interpretations: a meaningful imageability. Appreciation of architectural aesthetics is often linked to how the built environment engages in a creative dialogue with the user and the observer alike. It is necessary to explore this realm in design studio pedagogy. Conceptualisation of the performative dimensions of architecture, while taking into account the linkages between theory and practice is quite a complex situation. In this context relevance of aesthetical perception and associated areas of classification in providing value, meaning and language to Architecture is an interesting aspect.

Keywords: Cognition Sequence, Semantic Process, Architecture Imageability, Aesthetical Perception.

1. WHAT MEANS "AESTHETICS"?

Aesthetic as a conception is traditionally rich and varied. Various thinkers have continued to interpret the rational meaning of aesthetics and its relevance to human existence. "Aesthetics, also spelled esthetics, the philosophical study of beauty and taste. It is closely related to the philosophy of art, which is concerned with the nature of art and the concepts in terms of which individual works of art are interpreted and evaluated" [1]. Depending on the focus area there are various interpretations to the definition of Aesthetics. In the scenario of aesthetic appraisal of art work, it is often related to relevance of sensuous delight as highlighted by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in his preaching.

"Since works of art are (mostly) produced for this reason, i.e. to gratify our senses, the concept has since been applied to any aspect of the experience of art, such as aesthetic judgment, aesthetic attitude, aesthetic understanding, aesthetic emotion, and aesthetic

value. These are all considered part of the aesthetic experience and although we can still experience nature or people aesthetically, the phrase is most often used in relation to the arts, especially the visual art" [2].

A schematic activity sequence lays embedded in the whole process. "Aristotle tried to define the relation between the artist, the artwork and the art- consumer. He understood sensual perception as the interaction between order, balance and limitation. He used the terms Poiesis, Mimesis and Katharsis" [3].   In modern-day context researchers have tried to enquire about the activities involved in having an aesthetic experience.

Fig: 1 Schematic Model Diagram – Activity Sequence, Source: Author

This is often related to the understanding of the cognitive response system. It involves a systematic human response mechanism which involves implicit as well as explicit modes of information processing involving an object being perceived and certain traits of the subject doing the perceiving.
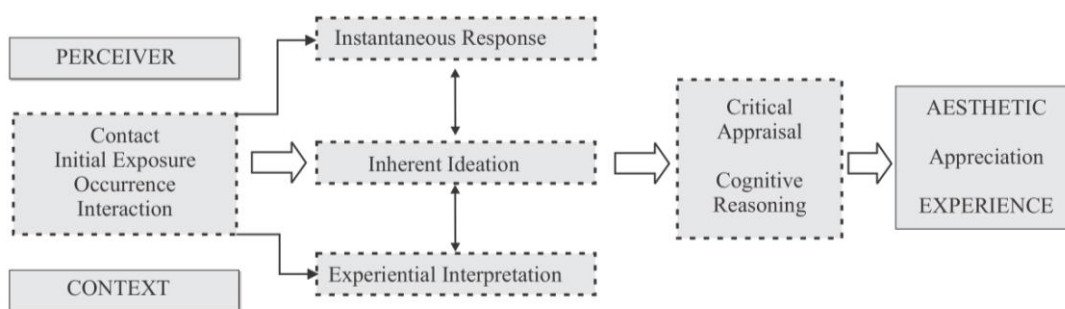

Fig: 2 Cognition Sequence, Source: Author

In relation to appraisal of built environment it is more intriguing and complex. "The question 'what is architecture?' may at one level seem obvious yet there has been, and continuous to be, considerable debate about what should be included in the term and we all have our own ideas and misconceptions" [4]. Most often conception of architecture is related to abstraction of highest order. Appreciation of architectural aesthetics is often linked to how the built environment engages in a creative dialogue with the user and the observer alike. However the level of enchantment imparted by aesthetical perception varies.

"When he looks at a building, an image falls on the retina of his eye. This image, which is a result of a process as mechanical as photography, has no meaning to him unless his mind has interpreted it, and his feelings or his emotions have responded to it. This response is bound to vary from person to person depending upon his receptivity and intelligence. The observer's consciousness of architecture is therefore, as personal a matter as the architect's intention" [5].

| Mishkal Masjid, Kuttichira | Pattalam Mosque, Mananchira Square | Muchundipalli, Kozhikode |

Fig: 3 Mosque: Architecture Imageability, Source: Photos (Web)

2. AESTHETICAL PERCEPTION AND ARCHITECTURAL ATTRIBUTES

The aesthetical value of architecture is closely related to the interpretations of language of architecture embedded in the built environment. The foundation being the contextual relationship between Time, Space and People. Just like authors of literary works exclusively make creative use of language, spoken and written words and sentences to evolve a world of fiction and classic.
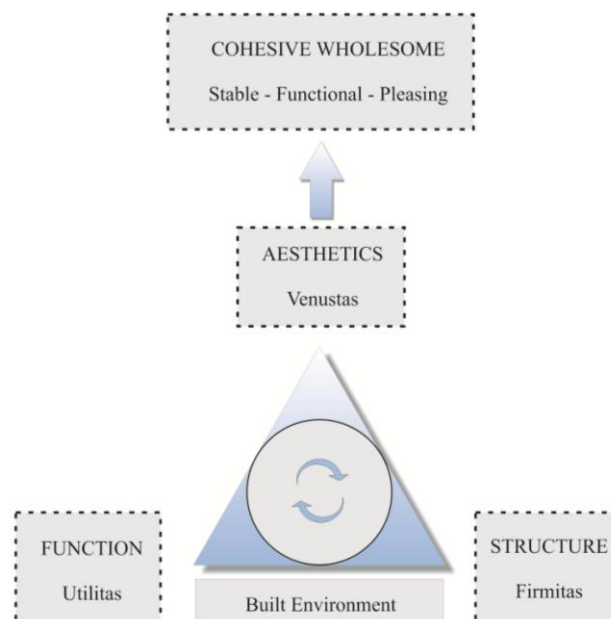

Fig: 4 Spatial Quality Index, Source: Author

Vitruvius is famous for asserting in his book De architectura – The Ten Books of Architecture that a structure must exhibit the three qualities, firmitas, utilitas, venustas – that is, it must be firm, useful and beautiful. These are sometimes termed the Vitruvius virtues or the Vitruvian Triad. These traits are even relevant in present day scenario, the qualities that collectively make a built environment significant is often related to characteristics of structural stability, functionality

and delightful characteristics embedded in a building. A sense of cohesive wholesome is experienced by the user when such qualities are present in a built environment under appraisal.

Often it is observed that an ordinary individual tries to associate himself with a piece of architecture by considering the aesthetic values as well as novelty of characteristics in the built environment under review. The ability of the built environment to engage in an evocative dialogue with the user and the observer alike often determines the measure of acceptability as well as level of success the designer has achieved in creating a good work of architecture. Expressiveness is a virtue that adds delight and communicates the rational characterization of the utilitarian social institution being conceived in a particular built environment. The overall perceptual identity thus evolved often gives rise to cognition of associated attributes being conveyed symbolically by a built form like morphological, sociological, anthropological, historical etc.

Architecture as a manifestation of our spatial needs in space emerges through a creative synergy of creative expertise, technical intelligence, scientific knowledge and psychological reflection, guiding the act of designing built environment. For a built environment to be identified as being a piece of architecture there should be some attributes that lead us to this interpretation. Attributes which convey meaningfulness to the structure while appraisal is being done. In order to achieve this objective the architect usually endows his work consciously with such properties that instantaneously aids in establishing a semiotic interact or interpretations: a meaningful imageability.

The act of recognition in a literally context was interpreted by C.K.Ogden and I.A. Richards in a book about semantics called The Meaning of Meaning. "Ogden and Richards present the symbolic nature of language as a triangle, the three points representing referent, thought, and symbol" [6]. The triangle represents the semantic process, the coming into being of meaning. This model could be used for explaining the process of initial cognition in an observer in architecture realm also. Experiential possibilities and the process of cognition with respect to a traditional dwelling are illustrated.
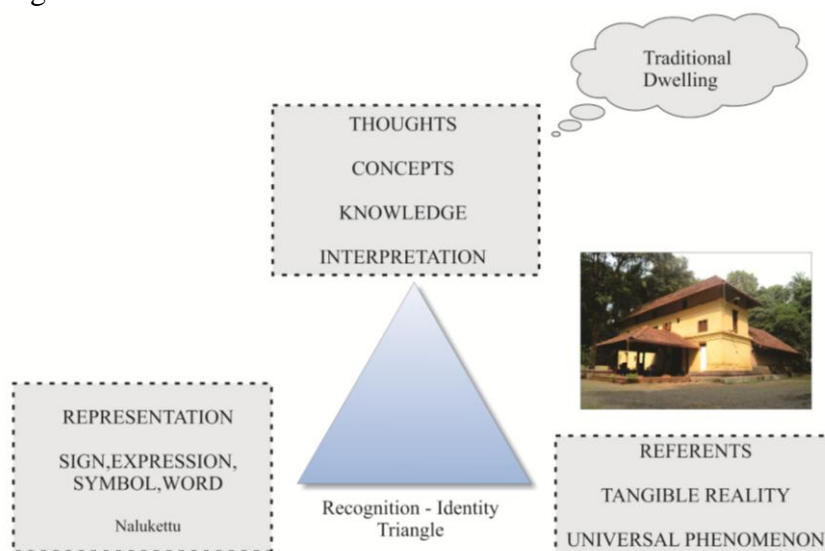

Fig: 5 Adaptation of Semantic Triangle, Source: Author

Ability to relate oneself with identifying a work of architecture is a latent trait rather than an inherent quality. Proper understanding and decoding of the language of the built environment enables the user and the observer alike to have proper cognition of the meaning and character of

the built environment. However the proficiency level varies from person to person, as each individual will have a varied background and education level. The value which is attached to the characteristics of architectural elements that collective bring about an interpretation of built environment and its meaningfulness is an outcome of various domains, off this social and cultural parameter plays a decisive position.

> Architecture is a language that we understand because we inhabit buildings; they surround us and create our world. To achieve a piece of architecture requires engaging with a process of thinking, drawing and designing, a process that ultimately produces a building.

> This process begins with an idea or 'concept' that relates to a particular site or context. It further develops (through a 'brief') into a 'form', which will have functions or activities associated with it. This form is then further developed structurally (as a frame or system), and materially (with a 'skin' or 'wrapping'). It is finally realised, framing experiences of light, sound, space [7].

Appreciation of aesthetical perception and architectural attributes is often linked to how the built environment is perceived. It is necessary to explore this realm in design studio pedagogy. Conceptualisation of the performative dimensions of architecture, while taking into account the linkages between theory and practice is quite a complex situation. In this context relevance of aesthetical perception and associated areas of classification in providing value, meaning and language to Architecture is an intriguing aspect.

2.1 Aesthetics as progressive imageability
The concept of a construction in our regional context has evolved from time immemorial, which highlights its uniqueness based on regional scriptures and preaching, treatises in ancient Indian Literature. Traditional regional architecture is vividly known for having its basis on Vaastu Shastra.

> "Vasthushasthra is the theory of the traditional building science of India which was formulated and developed through centuries of observation and practice. In the process it adapted to regional influences, and these regional versions had a great degree of autonomy. Vasthushasthra is derived from the root 'vas' meaning 'to dwell' or 'to occupy'" [8].

Various scriptures like Tantrasamuchaya, Manushyalaya-Chandrika and so on were testimonial to this. It could be generalised as a study of effective utilization of natural resources and harmonious zoning principles for design of built environment.

"Vaastu-Purusha Mandalas are models of the cosmos. Used as the generating order for both sacred and secular buildings, each is a perfect square, sub-divided into identical squares, creating a series which starts from 1, 4, 9, 16, 25 ….. upto 1024" [9]. This particular approach is reflected in the design of dwelling in the form of a grid. Made up of a schematic diagram showing the cardinal direction on the four sides of a square and a man's figure drawn diagonally with his head in the North East. "An interesting fact about the grid is that it is not static; the man revolves around the square and completes a full circle in one year. This diagram represents the non – static nature of the site itself and the movement of the earth around the sun" [10].
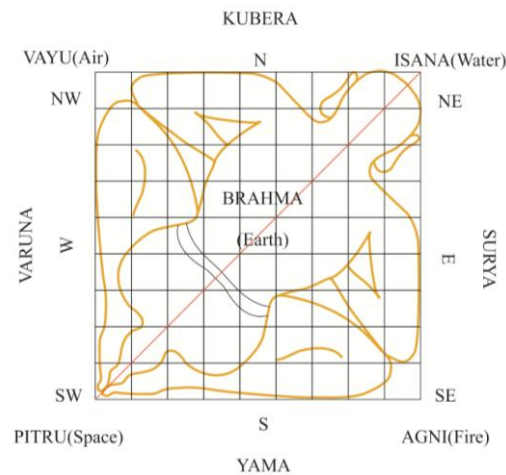
Fig: 6 Graphical Adaptation of Vasthu – Purusha Mandala, Source: Author

This planning theory is applied in the construction of a traditional dwelling in Kerala, commonly known as a Nalukettu, dwelling situated in a walled compound complimented by other supplementary structures. It was called Nalukettu because it was made up of four zones around a central courtyard, application of Mandala concept. The zones being: Vadakkini (facing north), Kizhakkini (facing east), Thekkini (facing south) and Padinjattini (facing west). It could also be interpreted on a rational manner as a form induced based on incorporation of tectonic principles of structural stability of a quadrangle induced form, the integration of passive climatic factors of natural ventilation, stack effect, water harvesting and sociological trait of joint families. Paving way for an intelligent additive – subtractive realisation of built form incorporating regional construction principles and materials. This iconic imageability of a dwelling is embodied with a sense of visual delight highlighting aesthetical virtues.

Fig: 7 Poonthanam Illam, Source: Author

The entry to the dwelling is through Padippura, gate house at the entrance of the plot. Positioned usually on the western or eastern side of the plot, the scale and complexity varies based on the caste and prosperity of the owner of the dwelling. A pathway leads to the Poomukhom, the living area of the main dwelling complex. Seating provisions made up of timber known as Chaarupadi is provided along the Poomukhom. This is complimented by a colonnade around the main house with deep overhanging eaves regionally recognized as Irayam. Further within is the core constituted by a courtyard and functional rooms located around it. This open to sky space is locally called Nadumuttam, the size of the opening is kept comparative to scale of the built form. Wooden stairs are normally provided to reach other floors and attic. The main structure is supplemented by auxiliary structures like Patthayappura (granary), Kulappura (Bathing Pond) etc.

2.2 Aesthetics as Perception

The aesthetics of a place or built environment has its roots in perception. Relationship between aesthetics and perception is a universal experience. "The root of aesthetics comes from ancient Greek:*aisthetikos*, pertaining to sense perception; *aistheta*, perceptible things; *aisthenasthai*, to perceive; *aisthesis*, sense perception. Clearly, aesthetics has to do with human perception" [11].

Perception is a dynamic and challenging process that involves all five senses: touch, sight, taste, smell and hearing in a normal context through which meaningful accounts of realisation is formed by an individual. "The perception process occurs in four stages: attending and selecting, organising, interpreting, and retrieving" [12]. Only through physical and sensory interactions it is possible to discover the spatial and affective qualities of a place. Interaction between Spaces and Users; architecture and its surroundings are important aspects which make architecture appropriate for its Place, Time and People. This to certain limits communicates the image about the built fabric as well as social identities of that particular area. The value embedded however depends on various traits of sociological indicators associated with a particular society.

Aesthetics as an act of sensory perception is thus correlated to what is perceived through the human senses, and requires the presence of an object to be perceived and a subject that does the perceiving. The basic mannerism of experiencing Architecture often elucidates the significance of totality, the integration of building with the surrounding environment.
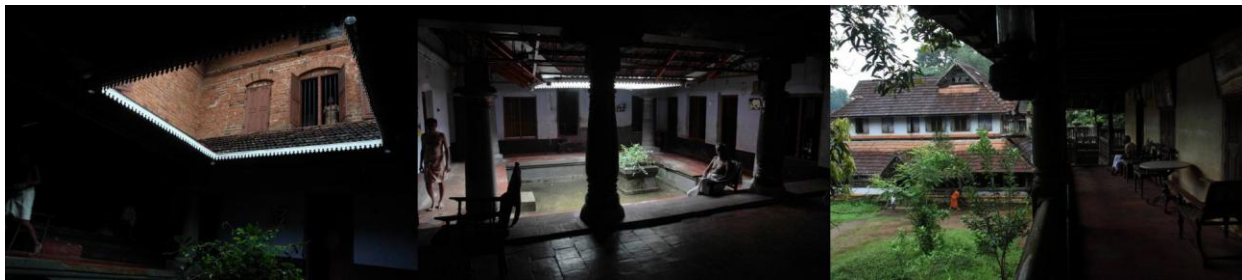
Umampalli Mana, Cherpu   Swarnathu Mana, Kochi

Fig: 8 Spatial Perception, Source: Photo - The Hindu – Mr. Thulasi Kakkat

2.3 Aesthetics as expression of beauty

Connected to the idea of beauty is the experience of pleasure in the aesthetic. This notion however could be either based on individual criteria of understanding or a common universal generalisation of attributes evident in a built environment, which makes it more relevant and worthwhile. Whatever may be the view point of appraisal "it seems contradictory to describe something as beautiful and deny that we are in anyway pleasurably affected by it" [13].

Fig: 9 Craft Work Padmanabhapuram Palace, Source: Author

Different cultures have varied perception about meaning of beauty. In Indian context the philosophical theory or set of principles governing the idea of beauty at a given time and place was linked to aphorism of Satyam (truth), Shivam (goodness) and Sundaram (beauty). The combination of separate aspects to form a coherent whole associated with human wellbeing in all his acts. The expression of beauty, its appraisal has definite links to the society and peoples progressive development of sense of appreciation. Expression of beauty is explicitly seen or experienced in numerous ways. The simplest and quite evident example is in the embellishment of structure. In traditional context, guilds of craftsmen have dedicated their lives in elevating the spatial quality of built environments.

2.4 Aesthetics as Socio-Cultural Artifact

In-depth review of built environments clearly indicates that architecture has a multi – disciplinary identity. There are definite links between the regional context and behavioural traits of people living in a society. Architectural identity of a locale or part of city could often be referred to as the biography of its people - a collective identity, which has evolved with time through profound behavioral and materialistic convergence. Requiring certain basic level of aesthetical mannerism, leading to identifiable whole characterized by built environment and its occupants. This experiential legibility cycle of reality -perception could be easily deciphered by proper appraisal. Spatial Character is an ideation used to interpret, design and externalize space. This is brought about by the organization of various elements of the structure and the relation applicable among these elements in a given context and having scope for continuity; this governs the spatial expression of a built environment. It is this totality that often a user or the observer takes for granted as delightful in other words – aesthetically pleasing built environment.

Fig: 10 Padmanabha Swamy Temple Complex, Source: Author

3. CONCLUSIONS

In architecture, design activity begins by evolving a conceptual idea and continues by transforming it into tangible activities. Aesthetical perception as discussed in its various dimensions and its cognition plays a crucial role in this creative process. For an individual to produce meaningful architecture it is essential that the person has a good sense of aesthetic attitude and aesthetic value not limited to superficial level. This is based on in depth awareness of transition of a society over time and proper cognition of diverse origins of various communities that make up the social fabric. Along with proper application of latest technological and materialistic know how aiming at creating rational, sustainable and contextual architecture with regional traits.

The basic source of ideation or inspiration behind a design development is always linked to integration of relevant conceptual aspects which trigger motion of design process in the right direction. It is initiated with the designers perception about the design issue, aided by experiential realisation of various factors linked with such a scenario. This provides convergence of resources

to a certain direction of quest. Awareness of precedents in a particular typology of habitat design development along with cognition of regional factors brings about a certain sense of totality to the designers pursuits. The designer may apply deductive or inductive means of approach for achieving the objective depending on personal level preferences and inclinations. This sequence of activities is illustrated as the conceptualisation index.
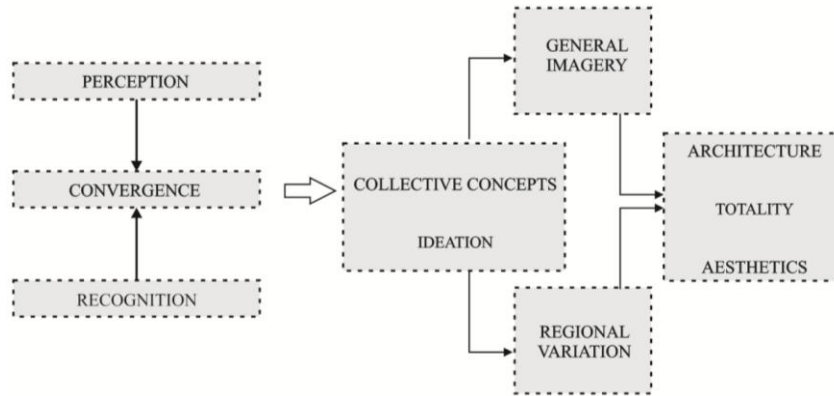

Fig: 11 Conceptualisation Index, Source: Author

This would mean working in an assorted setting yet trying to bring about coherence to the built environment. In general context we tend to appraise and relate a building in totality, the integration of building with the streetscape – street scenery and street life. This perspective of conception of built form is relatively vibrant and embeds a built environment with all its aesthetical charm. Keeping this aspect in mind it is necessary to understand the actual meaning and relevance of attributes associated with the phenomenon of Architectural Aesthetics in Design Studio discourses. Since the basic objective of architectural design education could be thought of as educating architecture students to produce meaningful architecture.
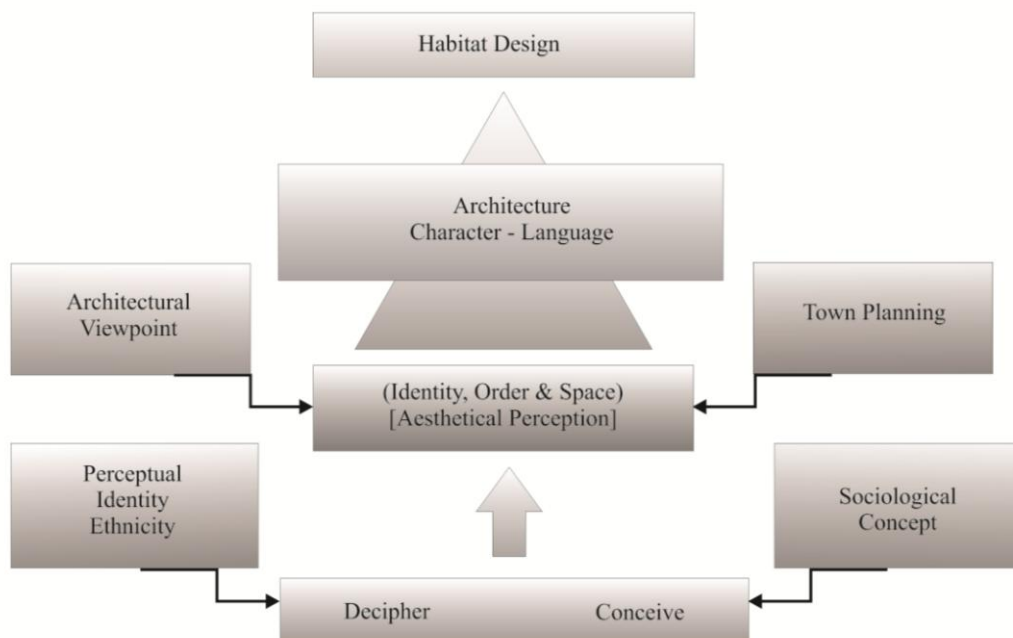

Fig: 12 Conceptual Framework, Source: Author

Architectural Design Development involves multi disciplinary inputs paving way for a platform for initiation of thought process which later on transforms into tangible realisations in the form of space – Habitat Design. Architectural as well as Town Planning factors influence the overall

imageability of built environment realised through rational design codes evolved as well as written. These approaches provide directionality in evolving identity, order and space in an appropriate manner. Capable of elucidating architectural character - language to the habitat realm. These aspects when perceived collectively elevate the level of delight in an observer or user and this phenomenon is known as aesthetically pleasing experience.

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