

Navigating the road to sustainability through thoughtful landscape designs

“Designing sustainable spaces should involve a collaborative approach, a platform where landscape architects are involved right from the start of the project.”

Landscape may not be the most attention-grabbing element during building design. But, Ar. Subhagya elucidates why landscape deserves an equally important place, as thoughtful landscape designs address long-term sustainability issues, especially in the urban context.

What are the long-term sustainability issues involved in creating water-intensive developments in hot and humid ecosystems, like the majority of regions in India?

The primary issue that is often evident in Indian cities is the disrespect for the natural drainage system, disturbing it or even covering it with concrete. Even though several major Indian cities receive heavy rainfall, they fail to capture and store this water for future use, resulting in issues like floods and droughts. As every city aspires to become a metropolitan, there is a large

water demand, ultimately depleting the hydrological cycle. Prioritising regionally appropriate plant species, implementing smart irrigation systems, and soil enhancement strategies are key considerations in landscape architecture that drive long-term sustainability.

An increasing population has led to space constraints in several metro cities in India. What are the best methods to achieve sustainable landscaping in such scenarios?

We need to step back and ask ourselves why this is happening. Our urban development policies, leading to over-construction without understanding the most critical parameter, “built to open space ratio,” are one of the major reasons. We must prioritise our open spaces while undertaking any new development. Having said that, I firmly believe that streets have the highest potential to make cities sustainable, a reality that has been ignored the most. Beyond integration of green infrastructure, urgent attention is needed so that creative street sections are utilised to make allied elements like connectivity, functionality, visual aspect, macro- and micro-climate, safety, public spaces, storm water management, historical and cultural identity, land use integration, economic viability, and recreation for seamless amalgamation.

Can you walk us through your design philosophy to integrate sustainability principles into landscape designs to minimise environmental impact and promote ecological resilience?

Our design always starts with three aspects – understanding the natural layers of the site, its immediate context, and the larger context. The first aspect helps us to suggest soil, water, and vegetation strategies, aiding us to create an ecosystem



which thrives and enhances the native climate; the second gives us a direction to design in a way that it becomes the extended language of the city; and the last aspect guides us to connect the design to the larger ecological network.

What are your thoughts on collaborative working, and where are we lacking?

My underlying philosophy is “Collaborative working is the way forward”! However, I think in India, we mistake it for co-existence. Imagine a situation where the pieces of a puzzle are just thrown randomly on the table. Will it solve a puzzle? No...because one has to understand not only about their own expertise but also be aware of whom do they work with, especially the professionals from the allied fields as well. Also, landscape architects play a crucial role in guiding and fixing this puzzle at the right time and in the right place, as they see not only the open space dynamics but also have a role at the master planning level. Hence, that is where the importance of collaboration comes into foray and further justifies the onboarding of a landscape architect right from the inception of a project, irrespective of the scale and typology.



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