

knowledge content," adds Qian.

Dr Hamada thinks Arab intellectuals (and linguists) could have done better.

"Arab intellectuals, especially Arab linguists, have to discard their introvert approach in doing academic research on the automatic processing and indexing of Arabic.

"We do not have efficient mechanism to synchronise with international language technologies and localise them. This affects the way we post Arabic texts and search for them."

Language Monopoly

As most of the language automation technologies are developed on an individual or commercial basis, Arabic has become much of a monopolised commodity.

"Due to the absence of state-sanctioned research initiatives on the automation of Arabic, the Arabic language, once a right for all, turned into a property of any firm doing research. So, the average person cannot use the advanced language technology in tapping online resources in Arabic.

iHorizons CEO Mohammed Al Tikriti thinks the current Arabic search engines and indexing tools need a rethink.

"We need to develop new customised Arabic online searching and machine translation tools. The current ones are mostly developed by Western gi-

"The Arab Nation's future and identity are at threat in the absence of realistic initiatives to build, develop and tap an efficient Arabic online content."
Dr Nabeel Ali,
International NLP Expert

ants (Google, MSN, Yahoo...), so they serve merely commercial needs.

"These giants operate online ad businesses, and because the Arab region contributes very little to their revenues, they invest very little in technology for the region."

Reason for Optimism

Experts believe the currently limited landscape of Arabic content is projected to change. A few initiatives may change the whole situation, says Al Tikriti.

iHorizons is doing a process in association with The Qatari Heritage Library to digitise its books on Qatari heritage.

"This project will allow huge amounts of the Qatari heritage online."

Also a new Arabic search engine is being designed by iHorizons.

"iHorizons, in association with Carnegie Mellon, and ictQatar, QF and QU, is developing an Arabic search engine, which will take into account the knowledge needs of the Arab internet users. The coming two years will see it launched," informs Al Tikriti.

Dr Hamada says other initiatives in Egypt are underway.

"The Centre for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (Bibliotheca Alexandrina) is currently in partnership with Ministry of Communications (Egypt) to digitise and post the entire Egyptian heritage.

On the region level, the Council of Arab Ministers of Communications has another plan for digitising Arabic heritage from around the region.

Language Technologies Institute (Pittsburgh), Director, Dr Jaime Carbonell says another global initiative, being in the planning phase, bears very ambitious prospects.

"Egypt, China, India and the US are in partnership to digitise a million books in all human languages



Egypt, China, India and the US are in partnership to digitise a million books in all human languages in effort to preserve the human heritage. The books will be posted on several sites for free. Egypt alone put the Bibliotheca Alexandrina at the disposal of the project.

Dr Jaime Carbonell,
Director, Language Technologies Institute,
Pittsburgh

in effort to preserve the human heritage. The books will be posted on several sites for free. Egypt alone put the Bibliotheca Alexandrina at the disposal of the project."

Now the question is, can these initiatives bring about a real revolution to the way Arabs receive and share knowledge online? Or will add loads of useless stuff to the current one? ■

Green Buildings: Are We Doing Enough?



Call for a Green Building Council

BY SINDHU NAIR

THE urgent need for a Green Building Council and a Building Code was stressed by experts at the recently held Qatar Today Round Table (QTRT), while deliberating on the issue Green buildings: Are We Doing Enough?

At the end of a vibrant exchange of views on whether the industry was doing enough for the environment, the panellists recommended the setting up of a common platform comprising contractors, designers, government bodies and public institutions, that would work towards minimising environment damages caused by indiscriminate construction activities.

The building industry is a major contributor to the country's economy. But it has a negative impact on the environment. This industry consumes and depletes much of the earth's resources. It accounts for 17 percent of fresh water consumption, 30 to 40 percent of energy and 40 to 50 percent of raw materials. It also generates 33 percent of carbon emissions.

With these figures, it becomes imperative that the industry pulls its weight and takes actions to counter the effects.

In this third edition of QTRT, the participants discussed the real issues, the actions that are viable, and ones that are not. What are the related costs of making sustainable build-

ings? Where do we strike the balance between the pace at which things are happening in the country, the process shortcuts that contractors often want to take?

The experts who brought their experience and opinion to the table, included, from the Ashgal, Environment Expert Ghazy El Sayed Abdel Kerim E Sherif and Director of Environment, Health and Safety, Eng Khalid Mohammed Al Emadi; Kahramaa, Customer Service Manager Engineer Ahmed Al Mohannadi; GHD Manager – Architecture Martin Hay; Tata Consulting Engineers Services, Chief Architect Nilima Sharma; Qatar Foundation, Director of Facilities, Mohammed Al Malki; HSBC, Head of Global Banking, Kapil Chadda; AEB Head of Electro-Mechanical Department Hani Hawamdeh; DPA Lighting Consultants Director, Barry Hanford; from Philips Lighting, Chris Liebenberg, Channel Manager, and Ashok Vishwanathan, Business Development Manager and from Techno Q, Managing Director Zeyad Al Jaidah. The session was moderated by Engineer Issa Al Mohannadi, Development Director of Qatar Foundation/Doha Lands Company.

Sustainability: Macro level

Moderator Al Mohannadi steered the discussion on design sustainability by first asking each of the participant for their personal definition of the word 'sustainability'.

Sharma of TCE noted that sustainable planning should not limit itself to just buildings but take the whole infrastructure into consideration.

Hay broadened the subject and said that, sustainability is a lifestyle choice while Sharma defined it as



"In regulations, two concerns arise: coordination between what the various wings of the government decree and periodically revisiting the legislations."

Engineer Issa Al Mohannadi, Projects Development Director, Qatar Foundation/Doha Lands Company



"Kahramaa is willing to provide incentives to those who conserve energy and adapt systems for saving energy."
Eng Ahmed Ali Al Mohannadi, Manager, Customer Services, Kahramaa

meeting the needs of the present without compromising the choice of the future generations.

As part of its responsibilities, Ashgal has under its fold, schools, hospitals, roads, ministry buildings, infrastructure projects.

"Vision 2030 clearly underlies the need to keep the environment intact while looking at the urban concerns of roads, buildings and drainage.

"The Urban Planning department of Ashgal that is looking after the infrastructure of the new zones is insisting on the minimisation of energy usage and recycling of waste. In fact, one of the biggest projects of Ashgal is the \$3 billion building materials recycling plant," Al Emadi said.

"My experience in the GCC countries is that all development is based

on extremely short-term gain or profits. Ideas of sustainability for the second or third generation are just not there at all, but in this, the GCC countries are not alone. It is typical of all developing countries. The fortunate situation for Qatar is that it has healthy reserve funds, but the outlook to handle the funds should on a long-term basis and the returns on investment for the sector needs to be geared to a minimum period of five to 10 years," said Liebenberg.

LEEDS Platinum

Qatar has a harsh environment, with extreme climatic conditions and the buildings are supposed to guard us from all this.

"Our ancestors have coped well with the adverse climate. They have lived in buildings that makes the best of the resources, while guarding against the harsh climatic conditions, through the orientation of the building, the window position etc. They have demolished the building and made new buildings by using the old materials, while they lived in tents. They can qualify to be the best 'Green Buildings' and may even get LEEDS certification. But the economic conditions were different then, compared to what it is now. So do you really think we are going in the right direction?"

This was the question Al Mohannadi tabled.

Most of the participants were slightly cynical, but others pointed out that even if it were baby steps, it had to be lauded.

New residential developments like Lusail, Abu Hamour, Barwa are opting for better sustainability, according to Al Malki. "It is the older structures within the city that have not followed any norms."

For Hay, the planning of the city represents a planning structure that is mostly geared to business gains.

Environmental impact of any project that comes up for financing is of prime concern for HSBC. "The newer infrastructure projects like Al Waab has placed environment in the forefront. Their design is such that all the needs of life – from schools, to banks to market complexes are all within walking distance, minimising the use of transport. The challenge is in the old structures of Doha and to an extent, West Bay, which sadly, is an urban planning disaster," said Chadda.

Jaidah felt the country was getting the bad end of the stick. "We have to think of the challenges that the country faced. It had to compete with other GCC states and then there was the pressure of the Asian Games. Ashgal and the UPDA were under tremendous pressure. Now with the economical slowdown, this is the best



"With the economic slowdown, this is the best time to think and find solutions for long-term gains rather than short-term ones."
Zeyad Al Jaidah, Managing Director, Techno Q



“Vision 2030 underlies the need to keep the environment intact while looking at the urban concerns of roads, buildings and drainage.”
Eng. Khalid Mohammed Al Emadi
Director of Environment, Safety and Quality, Ashghal

time to think and find solutions for long-term gains rather than short-term ones. Now is the time to reflect and change.”

Design at the micro level

At the micro level of each building, design is a thought process comprising three factors – efficiency, comfort and performance – for Vishwanath of Philips Lighting. “And like a triangle, with one maximised, the other two suffer.”

“The idea is to strike a balance between profit and sustainability. When we finance any project that erodes the environment, we make sure that the project in some way replenishes nature. In the absence of this paradigm,

we opt out of such projects,” said Chadda. “It is high time we recognise that investment on environment has returns, may not be high or fast. These returns are low, but long term.

“We urgently need a carrot and stick approach. At the local level, for instance, the initiatives taken by Supreme Council of Environmental Research (SCENR) which has looked at the industries and their impact on the environment, now needs to dovetail its concerns with Urban Planning to integrate and deepen the model of a good and sound checking. This is the stick part.”

Carrots, for Chadda, should be the effort taken by the private sector to develop sustainable models of development.

“Private sector companies like Philips can contribute a great deal in such concerns. Lighting takes up 19 percent of global energy consumption. With wise use and a little conscious effort, this can be brought down to 8 percent,” said Liebenberg.

Government rules: Balanced?

While working on the carrot and stick approach outlined, there needs to be sync between what the various government agencies are recommending.

While dwelling on this, Al Mohannadi (moderator) commented, “The purpose of government regulations is to ease compliance. Two concerns arise: coordination between various wings of government decree and periodically revisiting the legislations. The latter is being touched upon by the Qatar General Specification Society in updating and customising legislations in tune with ground realities.”

Hawamdeh pointed out the lack of a compliance framework here making it difficult for the designers to make any mark in the field due to these constraints. “The test for the government in developing this stick approach is to

find the right balance. But this sadly doesn’t exist. The problem we are facing with the private sector is that, there is a concept here with the developer looking into all sorts of ideas of renewable energy. But as the design moves on, we start seeing compromises ending with a building which is less than the normal conventional design.

“Everyone is just trying to meet regulations – but none of them has sat down to set regulations so there is nothing along the lines of allowing only a certain amount of KWs per square metre for instance. This design is not going to be accepted by certain planning councils if some aspects are not met – we as designers at the end of the day have to deliver the design



“In the GCC countries all development is based on extremely short-term gain or profits. Ideas of sustainability for the second or third generation are just not there.”
Chris Liebenberg,
Channel Manager,
Philips Lighting



“We urgently need a carrot (private sector) and stick (SCENR and Urban Planning) approach.”
Kapil Chadda, Head of Global Banking, HSBC

lay out and the good practice of the design, but a certain frame needs to be agreed upon with the private sector or the governmental sector. So far, there is currently no governmental authority looking into consumption involved in construction, as designers are lost between best practices and what customers want.”

Regulations to be worked on

Al Emadi, taking exception to the allegations from the designer on the absence of a proper framework, said, “We work to govern more from the point of view of the facilities that we can develop rather than the environment – we cannot cope beyond a certain limit so on this basis we fix the coverage area so that we can cater for a rough amount of population in this area. The space is creating a lot of problems – but it is agreed that we do need to work on this further.”

Ahmed Al Mohannadi from Kahra-

maa felt that though regulations were in place, it wasn’t a comprehensive one. But he highlighted on some of the regulations that were unique for Qatar in the region.

“All the buildings in Qatar come with thermal insulation and it’s the most advanced country in the GCC region, there is no house without thermal insulation and glazing, for which there is regulation. Kahramaa ensures that it is followed. We are also working on study for regulation of Energy Ration (ER) and the split A/Cs as there is currently no regulations or standards in Qatar for this. Qatar will have a finished standard for Energy Ration (ER), to create regulations on this. No A/C will come into the country without taking the ER restrictions into consideration. Kahramaa is willing to provide incentives to those who conserve energy and adapt systems for saving energy – we have just one customer at the moment who uses thermal storage in his building in the industrial area and will provide for incentives to those who are willing to invest in these environmentally-friendly systems to also encourage others to do that – and we have a system to encourage this.”

Green buildings cost more?

It is now a known fact that environmentally sustainable designs cost much more than any normal design approach, at the establishment stage. But the economics should be worked out for a longer term, according to the experts at the panel.

According to Hannaford, “It’s an investment – it’s a long-term investment and you really need to take the costs as part and parcel of what it is to adapt to the environmental concerns. It proves that it’s cheaper running costs for the buildings if you use the environmentally-friendlier systems, so in the long-term it comes out clearly cheaper. What we need at

this stage are incentives because the focus is still very much on the short-term gains.”

Hay was of the opinion that Green buildings by definition shouldn’t cost more than conventional buildings, because one should be using less material than normal to create them, so it’s a manufacturing led change that is required.

“Modern efforts of fabrication, such as upfront analysis and planning in terms of capital planning should actually give you cheaper buildings.”

Hawamdeh countered this view saying, “The issue related to costs comes back to two points, the first related to capital costs and pay-back period and if you optimise your design you shouldn’t exceed the designs for conventional methods. On the other side when you talk to renewable energy, the cost of energy per KW here in



“There is no single window dealing with sustainability concerns.”
Hani Hawamdeh,
Head of Electro-Mechanical Department, AEB



“Sustainability is meeting the needs of the present without compromising on the needs of the future generations.”
Nilima Sharma, Chief Architect, TCE

Qatar is cheapest in the world. When we see the pay-back figures for the renewable energy system, in the West it is estimated at about 30-37 years. In the GCC it is 230 years. At the end of the day, the price of energy etc here is so cheap; it does not provide an incentive for users to shift to more green methods of environment.”

Materials used in construction

Another question that rises in the topic of construction is whether the construction materials are harmful to the environment and if they are, how do we improve our building materials and move towards using recyclable materials.

Al Emadi brought attention to the fact that most of the materials for the construction industry were being sourced from neighbouring countries. But Hawamdeh pointed out that

when one talks of environment it is the whole world that is taken into picture.

Al Emadi reemphasised the point, saying, “We can also reuse old materials from demolished buildings, as Qatar is now faced with a lot of waste materials that we don’t know what to do with.

“The recycling methods we are planning is the re-use of demolished building leftovers, stored in one of our quarries, and we will use these materials in our roads and buildings. This is another advantage that Qatar is looking forward to recycle billions of riyals worth of building materials. Environmentally, boring for materials is a wasteful process in Qatar, because we have limestone here which isn’t good enough for the construction industry.

“We often end up with a lot of waste materials with which we don’t know what to do.

“We have to depend on Iran and Yemen as well as the UAE which produce better materials – so it is environmentally friendlier to use their products.”

A matter of lifestyle

The question of sustainability boils down to the way you live and conserve resources.

Sharma brought attention to the projects that TCE has been involved in for years in such sustainable areas. “We have contributed to norms and rules in good design practices in the country, so contractors are forced to foot the bill for safety measures.”

Chadda talked about HSBC’s core values which try to incorporate these lifestyle changes.

“It is quite simple. We encourage Reduce, Reuse and Recycle principles in our daily working atmosphere. About 75 percent of our global giving is for education, to engage with schools and focusing on the next generation.”

Liebenberg agreed that mindset change was necessary.

“A fresh mind is easier to change so energy awareness should be drilled into young minds.”

Malki talked about QF’s contribution in educational awareness. “We are educating our students by putting initiatives into action, like the solar water heaters for solar energy.”

Ahmed Al Mohannadi opined that he too changed due to the responsibility of the role he was playing in Kahramaa.

He brought emphasis to the incentives the Government has taken to drill awareness into the lifestyle here.

“An Emiri decree has been introduced where light fixtures should not be used during the day and vehicles not to be washed in private com-



“Sustainable building, design is a thought process comprising three factors – efficiency, comfort and performance.”
Ashok Vishwanath, Business Development Manager, Philips Lighting

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“We are educating our students by putting initiatives into action, like the solar water heaters for solar energy.”
Mohammed Al Malki,
Director - Facilities Management,
Qatar Foundation

pounds and thus waste energy and water.

“Customers want to come to us directly to pay bills; it is a matter of practice. Now we have introduced e-cash facilities and we have taken another step and introduced a 10 per-



cent cut on the bills to those who use this e-facility, thereby losing close to half a million riyals annually.”

Liebenberg brought attention to global solutions that encourage conservation.

“We could have a scale on which we could subsidise or even give incentives to become more energy efficient creating a green building from top to bottom using the latest technology. We can also develop a system in the country of providing an automatic system to shut down lights and A/C system if an area is unoccupied. We could turn the building into a more smartly green building; these are simple things that we can already be done at a high level.

The way Forward...

Bringing the discussion to an end, the moderator, Al Mohanadi said that, there seems to be an urgent need for regulations to be revisited and the need for standards for Green Buildings and the Infrastructure.

“If we ask ourselves whether we have a sustainable industry, the answer is No, but it is encouraging to note that steps are being taken.

“We (Doha Land and QF) have been engaged in the last four to five months to launch the Green Building Council and are in the last stages of the construction of this council. We encourage all contractors, designers, government institutions to come to this common stage and promote awareness of the need of such Green Building Initiatives. A healthy building code is being formulated and we will work with the Government for the regulations. The future is bright and with the active participation of all sectors we can make a good road map for building such initiatives here.” ■

With inputs from Aparajita Mukherjee and Nadia Ismail

ABOUT QTRT

QATAR Today, Qatar’s only news, business and lifestyle magazine instituted the Qatar Today Round Table (QTRT) last year.

Held periodically, QTRT brings together stalwarts in different fields to discuss and debate about various issues ranging across thought spectrums cutting across issues as

diverse as focus on the country’s education system, the state of the health system, GCC monetary union or branding – issues that touch all our lives.

The Ritz Carlton-Doha has been the host and partner for QTRT since its inception. Techno Q sponsored this edition of the round table.

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