

## HAS THE DEVELOPER DELIVERED ?

The private developer, a new breed of actors in the built environment have come into being during the last decade. With the opening of the Economy, and with the revitalisation of the private sector as a main actor in development, both economic and environmental, the private developer has in fact begun to dominate the making and modification of the built-environment: Interestingly hardly any professional has turned out to be a developer, Neither the Architect nor the Engineers seem to have the knack for this thing called private development. Perhaps their professional ethics do not allow them to compete in the open market.



Nevertheless, a large portion of Architectural work commissioned today, are conceived, initiated and executed in keeping with the "vision" which developer provides. Development control agencies, environmental professionals, and in fact the governments have bent on downward to realise the "dreams" of the developers.

The urban fabric and the built environments are under siege of the developers in many parts of the world.

Sri Lanka is no exception. We have begun to see the bulldozer rolling down the coconut estates, in the suburbs, the surveyors grid on the paddy fields, and the piling rigs in the city centres and busy highway rolling all the way to create and realise the developer's dream.

One of the major areas in which the developers have mushroomed at an alarming rate is the housing sector, both urban and rural, the marketing place where the small practitioner had the opportunity to develop architectural practices. No doubt the "trend" has helped young architects indirectly as well. But the major issue is the way in which the private developer buys, breaks up and sells land in the Suburbia and loads the plots with speculative housing. The "planning" of neighbourhood is now entirely a 'surveyors' business of breaking up large blocks of lands to smaller blocks and the planner has no role whatsoever in the planning of neighbourhoods. The architect's role is no exception. Perhaps it is time to take a stock of the situation now that there is a question mark in the developer's dream.

A recent research indicates that "almost every property developer in the market ignored the fact that consumers have different taste" Economy pre-dominates and the standardized houses with repetition and monotony abounds. The research says "Quality of Materials used in construction of houses by most of the property developers is doubtful." Majority of them use cheap timber, bathroom fittings, taps and other building materials. Quality of construction is equally bad. There is ample evidence that the property developer seeks to impress the client with "impressive looks" and catching appearance and take him for a ride. But certainly not far long.

From the point of view of a developer he sells a product which has a market demand. The price should compete with his competitors. A repetitive production brings the cost down.

Maximum disposable land plots bring him value for land. Therefore basic principals of subdivision and type plan concept becomes a pre-request. From the point of view of the buyer, first of all what he need is a house in a respectable neighbourhood within his affordability. But when he achieve this target his needs are further changing, character, identity, social and built environmental atmosphere becomes the primary needs. Then he is again not satisfied. Now only he realises things in a settled mind.

However creatively attractive the business of property development appears, the fact that very few development companies continue in the business for over two years is an eye-opener.

What is also interesting is the fact that the



private developer is not thriving on architecture, and the consumer's choice, for private developer is largely due to other reasons. A recent research attributes the following factors as major reasons for consumer choice for private developer housing.

- (A) Inability to devote time to supervise construction.
- (B) Convenient to buy them to build.
- (C) Having a house for easy payment schemes.
- (D) Arrangement of the loans by the developer.

If this is the case, and if the architecture is in demand, and also if the neighbourhoods developed by the private developer is also quality less what do we do as Architects. Do we have a responsibility to intervene? Do we have a sense of concern to air or do we just sit back and wait?

We claim that the architect is the maker of the built environment and that we know best. We have got a mandate to lead, and to lead not only individual clients but the society as a whole.

Hasn't the property developer broken the ground around us just underneath our own feet. If the private developer

led housing is hopelessly unappropriated for the society how will it be when the rest of the world is also given in to their dreams and visions.

With the introduction of the open economy the developer was given free had to deliver. The question is what he was supposed to deliver, political dream, dream of common masses or his own dream? Whatever the intention was what has finally realised was that the developer's dream, which satisfied his needs. We had to sacrifice our urban/suburban space in return to this.

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*"Built Environments need to be seen as a system of settings; that one cannot look just at buildings or stretch, open spaces or settlements. The extent of the relevant system need to be defined and discovered, not assumed a 'priori'.*

*Rapoport Amos, (1987)*