

'Into The Nature' - A Socio-Cultural-Architectural Workshop in Neelam Valley

Ar. Farida Ghaffar

A 9-day long Workshop titled, 'Into The Nature' was a collaborative effort between HUDA (Hazara University Department of Architecture) Mansehra and Department of Architecture and Planning, NED University, Karachi in 27 May – 2 July 2016. 37 enthusiastic architecture students from the two universities travelled to Neelum Valley and embarked on the mission of researching socio-cultural context in order to understand the traditional architecture and contemporary practices at the three prominent indigenous settlements namely Kel, Janawai and Taobut in Neelum Valley of Azad Kashmir. The research outcome was transformed into Architectural solutions for a site in the beautiful setting of Neelum River at Janawai near a Heritage Museum housed in a traditional wooden structure.

The Workshop was led by Ar. Adnan Anwar (HUDA) who was ably assisted by Mishkat Khetran (Iqra University, Islamabad), Kashif Shehzad (HUDA) and Ar. Farida Abdul Ghaffar (NED University). The Workshop aimed to highlight Architectural design elements of indigenous communities and traditional living patterns connected to them. Such method of research was introduced by renowned architect Christopher Alexander and gives an insight into how social structures are embedded in architectural forms. This research can deal with human system and their environment and speaks about the importance of preserving indigenous lifestyle and not about global form of Architecture. Workshop outline was prepared in consultation with Ar. Zahra Hussain, Founder and Director Laajverd Visiting School (LVS) who already had conducted similar Workshop previous year.

Participants were divided into six groups and arrangements were made to take them into the field accompanied by local social workers so that they could interact with the community and study their abodes, construction techniques, materials and planning typologies. Prior to field survey, Ar. Adnan and Ar. Farida discussed with the participants various methods of conducting field research, data collection, data compilation and documentation strategies. The main objective of the Workshop was set out to design a Museum and a Guest House keeping in mind local architectural patterns, traditional values with alternate materials to discourage on-going deforestation.

The workshop methodology was a mix of many hours of studio working and recreation including hiking, music, camping, bonfire, discussions and pinups with the advisors. The workshop concluded after enthusiastic participation by all the student groups, one design was selected by a jury for construction at the proposed site.