

National Institute of Disaster Management,
(Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India),
Plot no. 15, pocket-3, block-b, sector-29
Rohini, Delhi -110042

Subject: Submission for Best Practices for Knowledge Platform on Urban Resilience – Case Study on 'The North' Collective

Dear Sir/Madam,

Greetings from IIM Sirmaur!

I thank you for giving IIM Sirmaur the opportunity to submit to the Call for Best Practices for Knowledge Platform on Urban Resilience. I appreciate your effort to document exemplary initiatives and strategies that have contributed to urban resilience.

The team from IIM Sirmaur is documenting the case study of a collective called, *The North*. It emphasises how techniques, deeply rooted in local knowledge, offer sustainable and resilient solutions for seismic-prone areas like Himachal Pradesh. By preserving and promoting these traditional methods, *The North* seeks to influence contemporary urban development, fostering resilience through culturally and contextually relevant practices.

We look forward to the opportunity to engage further on this important topic. You may contact Prof. Ujjwal Kango (9811586228) or Prof. Advaita Rajendra (9824264785) for any further questions.

Best Regards,

Prof. Prafulla Agnihotri
Director

IIM Sirmaur

Thematic Area: Infrastructure Resilience

Sub-thematic area: Green and Sustainable Infrastructure



Title: Past Meets Future: *Building sustainable homes with The North Collective*

Location: Naggar, District: Kullu, Himachal Pradesh

Before Situation:

In Himachal Pradesh, traditional building techniques such as Kath Kuni and Dhajji Dewari have been central to the local way of life for centuries. However, as people aspire to embrace and become 'modern', these vernacular techniques, which are not only sustainable but also highly resilient to seismic activity, are gradually disappearing from Himachal's landscape. The modern 'pucca' houses, seen as more durable and desirable, have begun to replace these traditional building practices. This is particularly concerning, as the state faces low adoption of earthquake-safe building practices despite its high seismic vulnerability, with six of its twelve districts located in Seismic Zone V, the highest risk category. The state faces the risks of seismic vulnerability due to the shift towards non-traditional construction methods that are often unsuited to the local geography and climatic conditions. Communities have become increasingly disconnected from the rich heritage of traditional building practices, which were built to coexist with nature. The loss of these techniques has also led to a gap in the skills required for sustainable construction.

Implemented Measure:

North, a collective based out of the Kullu region in Himachal Pradesh, initiated a project to revive the traditional building techniques of Himachal Pradesh. They focused on Kath Kuni and Dhajji Dewari architecture, which uses locally sourced materials like wood, stone, and mud. Their approach was multifaceted, combining hands-on workshops for the local community and Kaarigars, research and documentation of traditional practices, and the development of homestay projects blending traditional building practices with modern comforts, that serve as live demonstrations of these techniques.

Their campus is spread over 1.2 acres, with 60% of the area left as an open green space and an orchard. The centrepiece of the campus is a beautifully restored Kath Kuni building. This building includes a studio which serves as a home for the institute team, a spacious artist workshop, and some homestay rooms for visitors, and a community kitchen. To demonstrate their commitment to low-impact construction, the campus also houses a 'Dhajji cabin', (as shown in Picture 1) crafted from reclaimed wood and stone, showcasing how the traditions can be blended with modern aesthetics. The cabin isn't just about preserving the past—it incorporates modern comforts, ensuring that sustainable, traditional architecture doesn't have to mean sacrificing convenience. The collective also organises cultural exchange programs, offers internships, and also provides livelihood opportunities for traditional kaarigars (craftsmen) who's skills were at the risk of disappearing altogether. The entire campus reflects a harmonious blend of tradition, innovation, and a mindful approach to living.

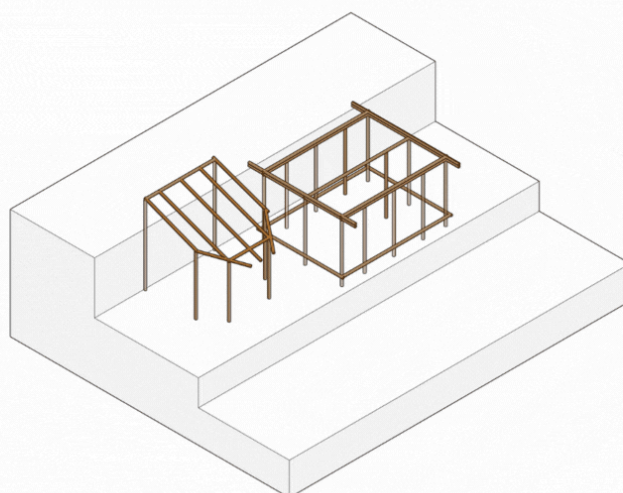
Significant Effect after implementation:

The implementation of these traditional building techniques through North Collective has significantly increased awareness of vernacular architecture and its importance in disaster resilience. The initiative has not only helped to preserve traditional knowledge but also demonstrated the practical benefits of using these techniques in modern construction. By building earthquake-resilient structures and encouraging local craftsmanship, the initiative aims to increase the seismic resilience of the region. The campus has helped to showcase how to blend traditional building practices with modern comforts and equipment, creating spaces that are both desirable and functional. This helped to shift perceptions, as these structures were no longer seen as 'kacha' constructions, but as well-built, sustainable homes. Moreover, when tourists from the cities visited and appreciated the campus, it has also inspired locals to take pride in their heritage and revive these traditional building practices. Moreover, North's projects, such as Jana Trails, Naggar Castle, and the Dhajji Cabin, have inspired a

resurgence of traditional building practices like Kath Kuni and Dhajji Dewari. These initiatives, along with upcoming projects like the Rohtang Ropeway and She Haat, seamlessly integrate sustainable, locally-sourced materials and techniques, setting a precedent for blending heritage craftsmanship with modern functionality. Overall, society needs to borrow from indigenous techniques not only because they are context-based, climate-responsive and earthquake-resilient, but also because they have evolved from the lives of people over a long period of time. They are expressions of local culture, value systems and oral heritage, and perfect examples of balanced living in the mountains.

Financial Details: The initial investment for North Collective's sustainable architecture projects, including the homestay and workshops, was funded through a combination of personal capital, tourism income, and local partnerships. The construction of the reclaimed wood cabin cost approximately INR 15 lakhs, with materials sourced locally, significantly reducing costs. The workshops are facilitated by fee from the participants and the generated revenue is reinvested into further research and infrastructure development.

Maps, graphs, pictures and relevant sources (to be attached)



step 1
Placing beams and columns

Figure 1: Picture (above) and animation (below) of Dhajji cabin situated in the North campus which serves a guest house for tourists.

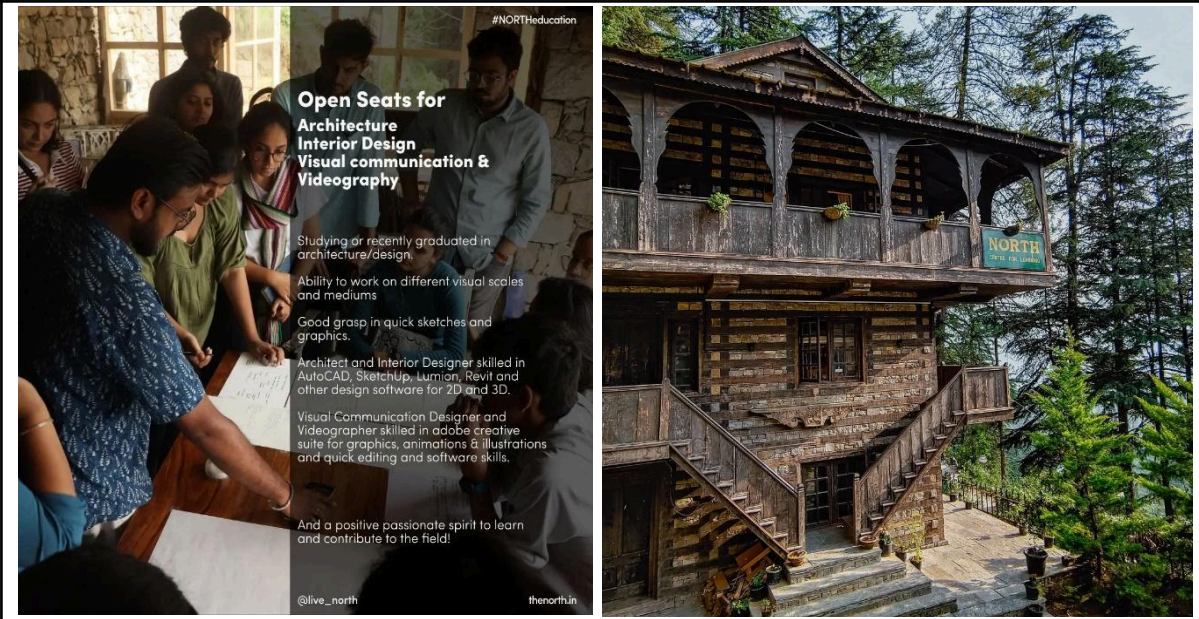


Figure 2 (left): Instagram advertisement showing internships in the North.

Figure 3 (right): The main building of the North institute, a Kath Kuni building which includes a studio, an artist workshop, and some homestay rooms and a community kitchen.



Figure 4: The founder Rahul, with participants and architects at the North



Figure 5 (top): A close look at the designs

Figure 6: A day at work at The North