Sustainable Architecture in Civil Engineering: A Comprehensive Analysis of Design Strategies, Materials, and Environmental Performance

Dr. Gautam Prakash, Shahrukh Jan, Rajan Kumar, Shambhu Nath Sharma

Department of Civil Engineering, Shri Phanishwar Nath Renu Engineering College,

Bihar Engineering University (BEU), Department of Science, Technology and Technical Education (DSTTE), Govt. of Bihar, India.

Abstract: The built environment significantly contributes to global energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, and water usage, necessitating innovative sustainable architectural approaches in civil engineering. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of sustainable design strategies, advanced building materials, and their environmental performance to support the transition toward low-impact construction practices. By systematically reviewing recent literature and conducting simulation-based case studies, the research evaluates the effectiveness of passive design principles, low-carbon materials, and integrated building systems across diverse climatic contexts. Life cycle assessment (LCA) and life cycle cost analysis (LCCA) are employed to quantify the environmental and economic impacts of various architectural interventions over a building's lifespan.

Key findings highlight the critical role of passive design elements—such as optimized building orientation, high-performance envelopes, and natural ventilation—in reducing operational energy demand. Among materials, mass timber and geopolymer concrete emerge as promising low-embodied carbon alternatives with favourable durability profiles. Trade-offs between embodied carbon and operational savings are identified, underscoring the importance of holistic assessment frameworks. Additionally, daylighting strategies not only improve occupant comfort but also reduce reliance on artificial lighting, further cutting energy use. The study's insights offer actionable recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and rating bodies (e.g., ECBC, GRIHA, LEED) to refine codes and promote sustainable construction. Emphasizing integrated design and material choices is essential to achieve net-zero goals and advance resilient, eco-friendly civil infrastructure.

Keywords: Sustainable architecture, embodied carbon, passive design, LCA, ECBC, net-zero

I. Introduction

1.1 Background & Motivation

The global built environment accounts for approximately 40% of total energy consumption and nearly one-third of carbon dioxide emissions worldwide *(IEA 2021)*. In addition, buildings are significant consumers of water resources and contributors to waste generation *(UNEP 2020)*. As urbanization accelerates, the environmental footprint of construction and operation intensifies, posing critical challenges to sustainable development. Integrating innovative design strategies with advanced materials and assessing their combined environmental performance is imperative to mitigate the sector's impacts *(Kibert 2016; Prakash and Suman 2023a)*. Sustainable architecture within civil engineering offers a pathway to optimize energy efficiency, reduce embodied carbon, enhance occupant comfort, and conserve resources holistically *(Prakash et al. 2022, Azhar et al. 2011)*.

1.2 Problem Statement & Research Gap

While extensive research exists on either building design or sustainable materials, few studies comprehensively analyze their synergistic effects across varied climate zones *(Prakash and Suman 2023b, Kumar et al. 2021)*. The trade-offs between embodied and operational carbon often remain inadequately quantified, leading to suboptimal design decisions *(Gupta et al. 2020)*. Moreover, limited empirical data link simulation-based performance metrics with real-world outcomes, especially regarding indoor air quality (IAQ) and water usage *(Liu et al. 2024)*. This research addresses these gaps by providing a cross-climatic comparative assessment integrating design strategies, material choices, and environmental performance.

1.3 Research Objectives

- Evaluate sustainable design strategies focusing on energy efficiency, thermal comfort, and water conservation.

- Compare low-carbon construction materials by their life-cycle environmental impacts and durability characteristics.

- Quantify the environmental performance—including energy, carbon emissions, water consumption, and indoor air quality—and economic costs associated with integrated sustainable architecture solutions.

1.4 Scope & Assumptions

This study focuses on mid-rise commercial and residential buildings across three climate zones: hot-arid, temperate, and hot-humid, representing diverse environmental challenges *(ASHRAE 2017)*. The functional unit is defined as a 1000 m² conditioned floor area

over a 60-year building lifespan. Assumptions include standard occupancy patterns, typical utility rates, and average material durability as per manufacturer data. Definitions of embodied carbon follow ISO 14040/44 standards, and operational carbon accounts for grid electricity emissions factors.

This research proposes an integrated framework combining systematic literature synthesis with simulation and life-cycle assessment to comprehensively evaluate sustainable architecture solutions. It advances existing knowledge by:

- Developing climate-sensitive design strategy matrices linked to material performance *(Yadav et al. 2024)*.

- Introducing multi-criteria performance metrics encompassing energy, carbon, water, and IAQ *(Loreto et al. 2025)*.

- Providing evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to improve sustainable construction codes and practices *(Patel et al. 2023)*.

II. Literature Review

Global and regional frameworks have set ambitious targets for decarbonizing the built environment, prominently emphasizing net-zero carbon emissions. Net-zero definitions vary, but generally aim to balance operational energy use with renewable energy generation and minimize embodied carbon through material choices and circular practices *(Myint et al. 2025)*. Rating systems such as LEED v4.1, BREEAM, GRIHA, NBC, and ECBC provide guidelines and benchmarks for sustainable building certification. These frameworks increasingly incorporate health and well-being standards, exemplified by the WELL Building Standard that targets indoor air quality and occupant comfort *(Kats 2019)*. Circular economy principles, including design for disassembly and material reuse, are gaining attention as essential to reducing life-cycle impacts and promoting resource efficiency *(EMF 2021)*.

2.1 Design Strategies

Effective sustainable architecture integrates multiple design strategies to optimize resource use and occupant comfort. Site planning and massing approaches—such as optimal building orientation, shading devices, and urban morphology—mitigate heat island effects and reduce cooling loads *(Santamouris 2014)*. Passive design techniques focusing on thermal performance address envelope insulation (U-values), solar heat gain coefficients (SHGC), airtightness, and incorporation of thermal mass and phase change materials (PCMs), alongside cool or green roofs, natural ventilation, and mixed-mode systems to reduce reliance on mechanical cooling *(Al-Sallal 2016; Zhai et al. 2017)*. Daylighting strategies employ metrics such as spatial daylight autonomy (sDA), useful daylight illuminance (UDI), and annual sunlight exposure (ASE) to balance natural light provision and glare control using shading devices and light shelves *(Reinhart and Wienold 2011)*. Active systems advancements include high-efficiency HVAC units, heat pumps, demand-controlled ventilation, radiant heating/cooling, and building energy management systems (BEMS) for optimized operation *(Olatunde et al. 2024)*. Water efficiency methods encompass low-flow fixtures, greywater reuse, rainwater harvesting, and sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS/WSUD) to reduce potable water demand and manage stormwater sustainably *(Fletcher et al. 2015)*. Renewable energy integration through photovoltaics (PV), solar thermal collectors, battery storage, and thermal storage complements these strategies to move toward net-zero operation *(IEA 2022)*.

2.2 Materials & Construction

Low-carbon material innovations play a pivotal role in sustainable architecture. Cementitious materials incorporating supplementary cementitious materials (SCMs) such as ground granulated blast-furnace slag (GGBS), fly ash, and limestone calcined clay cement (LC3), as well as emerging geopolymer and alkali-activated concretes, demonstrate significant reductions in embodied carbon while maintaining durability *(Mehta and Monteiro 2017; Provis 2018; Prakash and Suman 2021)*. Use of recycled steel and aluminium mitigates primary resource extraction impacts, while engineered mass timber products like cross-laminated timber (CLT), bamboo composites, and other bio-based materials offer carbon sequestration benefits and renewable alternatives *(Gustavsson et al. 2010)*. Prefabrication, modular construction, design for manufacture and assembly (DfMA), and 3D printing techniques advance construction efficiency, waste reduction, and potential for disassembly, supported by material passports for tracking life-cycle data *(Kunz et al. 2019)*. Additionally, material selection influences indoor environmental quality through low-VOC finishes, durability considerations, and maintenance requirements critical to long-term sustainability *(Prakash and Suman 2022, Fell et al. 2016)*.

2.3 Performance Metrics & Methods

Assessment of sustainable architecture requires multidimensional metrics. Energy performance is typically quantified by energy use intensity (EUI), peak demand, and load profiles over operational periods *(Deru et al. 2011)*. Carbon accounting differentiates operational emissions from embodied impacts following standards such as EN 15978 and ISO 14040/44, with whole-building life-cycle assessment (WBLCA) segmented by stages A (product), B (construction), C (use), and D (end-of-life) *(Crawford 2011)*. Thermal comfort and health are evaluated using indices like predicted mean vote (PMV), predicted percentage dissatisfied (PPD), and adaptive comfort models, while IAQ monitoring focuses on carbon dioxide, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and particulate matter concentrations *(ASHRAE 2017; Wargocki et al. 2019)*. Daylight evaluation employs sDA, UDI, and ASE metrics to optimize visual comfort and minimize glare *(Reinhart and Wienold 2011)*. Water performance metrics include liters per person per day, cubic meters per square meter per year, and water footprint analyses. Circularity is assessed through material circularity indicators (MCI), waste recovery rates, and design for disassembly feasibility *(EMF 2019)*. Resilience metrics such as overheating

risk, flood and heat stress vulnerability, and passive survivability reliability are increasingly incorporated to address climate change impacts *(Wong et al. 2022)*.

2.4 Synthesis of Gaps

Despite advances, significant gaps remain. Hot-humid and composite climate zones are under-represented in performance studies, limiting the applicability of findings globally *(Feng et al. 2021)*. Furthermore, post-occupancy evaluations (POE) linking simulation predictions with actual measured data on energy, IAQ, and occupant comfort are scarce, complicating validation efforts *(Azhar et al. 2019)*. Trade-offs between embodied carbon reductions and operational energy savings lack consensus in many contexts, particularly where low-carbon materials incur higher upfront costs or durability uncertainties *(Echenagucia et al. 2022)*. Holistic frameworks integrating environmental, economic, and social dimensions with multi-criteria decision support tools are needed to guide practitioners and policymakers effectively *(Li and Yao 2022)*.

III. Methodology

3.1 Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

The systematic literature review will follow the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility *(Moher et al. 2009)*. Relevant peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and reports published between 2010 and 2025 will be retrieved from major databases including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Search strings will combine keywords related to sustainable architecture, design strategies, low-carbon materials, life-cycle assessment, and environmental performance.

Inclusion criteria comprise studies focusing on design strategies or material impacts within the context of sustainable civil engineering architecture, studies providing quantitative environmental performance data, and those published in English. Excluded will be studies without empirical or simulation data, non-peer-reviewed sources, or those focusing solely on unrelated building sectors. Screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts will be conducted independently by two reviewers. The methodological quality of included studies will be appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist adapted for environmental engineering research *(CASP 2018)*.

Key data will be extracted using a standardized form capturing: building type (residential, commercial, institutional), climate zone, design strategies employed, material types and specifications, assessment metrics (energy use intensity, embodied carbon, IAQ), and study outcomes. Metadata including publication year, geographical context, and research methods will also be recorded.

Extracted data will be synthesized primarily through a narrative approach, categorizing findings by design strategy, material type, and climate zone. Where sufficient quantitative data exist, vote-counting and meta-analysis techniques will be applied to compare environmental impacts across studies. Qualitative synthesis will address contextual and methodological differences influencing outcomes.

3.2 Empirical/Comparative Study

The empirical study will include 3 to 5 mid-rise buildings representing diverse typologies (residential, commercial) and climates (hot-arid, temperate, hot-humid). Selected cases will exemplify a range of sustainable design strategies and material usage, including conventional and innovative approaches.

Data will be collected from multiple sources: Building Information Modeling (BIM) files and architectural drawings for physical and material details; Building Management System (BMS) logs and utility bills for operational energy and water consumption; and post-occupancy evaluation (POE) surveys for occupant comfort and indoor environmental quality feedback.

Simulation Workflow

Energy: Whole-building energy simulations will be conducted using EnergyPlus via OpenStudio or DesignBuilder platforms to estimate annual energy use intensity, peak demand, and load profiles under standardized weather files.

Daylight: Radiance-based simulations, facilitated by Ladybug-Honeybee tools in Grasshopper, will assess daylight metrics such as spatial daylight autonomy (sDA) and annual sunlight exposure (ASE).

Ventilation/CFD: Computational fluid dynamics (CFD) analyses using OpenFOAM or ANSYS will model natural and mechanical ventilation patterns, pollutant dispersion, and thermal comfort indicators within critical building zones.

Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)

A cradle-to-grave LCA will quantify embodied and operational carbon emissions using internationally recognized standards *(EN 15978, ISO 14040/44)*. The system boundary encompasses raw material extraction, construction, operation (energy and water use), maintenance, and end-of-life stages. Functional unit is defined as kg-CO_2 equivalent per square meter over a 60-year lifespan. Data will be sourced from Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs), databases such as Ecoinvent, and analyzed using LCA software tools including One Click LCA, Tally, or EC3.

Life-Cycle Cost Analysis (LCCA)

The LCCA will incorporate net present value (NPV) calculations considering initial construction costs, operational expenses, maintenance, and replacement costs over the building's lifecycle. Assumptions on discount rate, energy tariff escalation, and inflation will be transparently documented. Scenario analyses will compare costs across design alternatives.

Analysis

Design Strategies Analysis

Site/Massing & Microclimate

Strategic site planning and building massing are foundational to sustainable architecture. Orientation and form influence solar exposure, prevailing winds, and shading potential, which directly impact energy performance and thermal comfort *(Givoni 1998)*. For instance, elongating buildings along the east–west axis minimizes solar heat gain in hot climates. Incorporating high-albedo surfaces and vegetative cover reduces the urban heat island effect and supports outdoor thermal comfort *(Santamouris 2014)*. Green buffers and wind corridors can enhance passive cooling by redirecting breezes into the structure and around the site *(Olgyay 2015)*.

Envelope Optimization

The building envelope is the primary thermal barrier, and its optimization plays a critical role in reducing energy demand. High-performance insulation reduces conductive heat transfer, while appropriate glazing (with low U-values and optimal SHGC) balances daylight with solar control *(Lee and Tavil 2007)*. Airtightness minimizes infiltration losses, and thermal bridging must be addressed at junctions and penetrations for envelope continuity *(Straube and Burnett 2005)*. Retrofit applications often prioritize envelope upgrades to improve performance in existing structures, whereas new builds allow for full system integration *(Hernandez and Kenny 2010)*.

Daylighting & Glare Control

Well-designed daylighting reduces electric lighting demand while supporting occupant well-being. Metrics such as spatial daylight autonomy (sDA) and annual sunlight exposure (ASE) are increasingly used to evaluate daylight quality *(Reinhart and Wienold 2011)*. Effective glare control is achieved through fixed or dynamic shading devices, light shelves, and automated blinds *(Xie et al. 2020)*. Integrating daylight-responsive controls allows artificial lighting to dim in response to available daylight, improving energy performance *(Li and Lam 2001)*.

Natural/Mixed-Mode Ventilation & IAQ Strategies

Natural ventilation leverages temperature and pressure differences to promote air exchange, reducing mechanical cooling needs. When paired with operable windows and stack ventilation shafts, buildings can achieve hybrid or mixed-mode ventilation regimes, where mechanical systems operate only when needed *(Coley and Kershaw 2010)*. Indoor air quality (IAQ) is further enhanced by selecting low-VOC materials and deploying demand-controlled ventilation that responds to CO_2 or pollutant concentrations *(Wargocki et al. 2002)*. Mixed-mode systems are especially useful in transitional climates and shoulder seasons.

HVAC & Controls Integration

High-efficiency HVAC systems, when combined with smart controls, significantly improve energy performance. Zoning strategies allow independent thermal control across different spaces, reducing unnecessary heating/cooling *(Zhou et al. 2024)*. Set point optimization and setback schedules further minimize operational loads. Advanced fault detection and diagnostics (FDD) systems help identify equipment malfunctions or inefficiencies early, preserving performance and minimizing downtime *(Katipamula and Brambley 2005)*. Building Energy Management Systems (BEMS) can integrate occupancy data and weather forecasts to adjust system behaviour in real-time.

Water Efficiency & WSUD/SUDS

Water-sensitive urban design (WSUD) and sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) reduce the demand on municipal water supplies and mitigate runoff. Strategies include low-flow fixtures, dual-flush toilets, and water-efficient landscaping (rain gardens, xeriscaping) *(Hoban 2019, Sirishantha and Rathnayake 2017)*. Greywater reuse and rainwater harvesting can significantly offset potable water use, especially in water-stressed regions *(Domènech and Saurí 2011)*. These systems also contribute to the ecosystem health by filtering out pollutants and promoting groundwater recharge.

On-site Renewables & Storage

Integrating renewable energy systems into buildings supports energy independence and reduces operational carbon. Photovoltaic (PV) panel sizing must consider roof area, orientation, and local solar irradiance *(Fthenakis and Kim 2009)*. Coupling PV with battery storage allows buildings to shift loads and engage in demand response programs, improving grid resilience *(Luthander et al. 2015)*. Thermal storage, such as water tanks or phase change materials, can be used for both heating and cooling load balancing *(Palappan and Pasupathy 2018)*.

Industrialized Construction & Waste Minimization

Industrialized construction methods such as prefabrication, modular systems, and 3D printing offer multiple sustainability benefits. These include higher precision, reduced construction time, and minimized material waste *(Rojas-Herrera et al. 2025)*. Off-site fabrication ensures better quality control and reduces on-site disturbances. Design for Manufacture and Assembly (DfMA) principles also support deconstruction and material reuse, facilitating circular construction *(Lu et al. 2020)*. Digital planning tools like BIM further enhance waste minimization by improving coordination and reducing design errors.

Materials & Construction Analysis

Cementitious Pathways

Cement production is one of the most carbon-intensive processes in construction, contributing approximately 8% of global CO_2 emissions *(Andrew 2018)*. Alternative binders such as limestone calcined clay cement (LC3) and other supplementary cementitious materials (SCMs) like fly ash, ground granulated blast furnace slag (GGBS), and silica fume are gaining attention for reducing embodied carbon *(Barbhuiya et al. 2023, Marandi and Shirzad 2025)*. Geopolymer concretes and alkali-activated materials, derived from industrial by-products, exhibit high early strength and chemical durability, with potential CO_2 reductions of up to 80% compared to ordinary Portland cement *(Davidovits 2013)*. However, trade-offs exist—geopolymers may have limitations in standardization, availability, and curing requirements under field conditions *(Provis and van Deventer 2014)*.

Metals

Metals like steel and aluminium are essential structural materials in civil engineering due to their high strength-to-weight ratios, but they are also energy-intensive to produce. Incorporating recycled steel and aluminium can reduce embodied energy by up to 60% and 95%, respectively *(Hammond and Jones 2011)*. Fabrication processes such as rolling and welding add further environmental impacts and influence structural properties. Additionally, corrosion protection (e.g., galvanization, epoxy coatings) is crucial in extending lifespan, especially in humid or coastal environments, which in turn reduces maintenance frequency and life-cycle costs *(Koch et al. 2016)*.

Timber & Bio-Based Materials

Timber, especially engineered forms such as cross-laminated timber (CLT) and glued laminated timber (glulam), offers a renewable and carbon-sequestering alternative to traditional materials. When sustainably sourced, timber can store atmospheric CO_2 for decades during a building's life *(Gustavsson et al. 2010)*. However, its performance is sensitive to fire, moisture, and biological degradation, requiring treatment and protection strategies *(Buchanan and Levine 1999)*. At end-of-life, wood can be reused, recycled into products like particleboard, or used for bioenergy, supporting circular economy goals *(John et al. 2016)*.

Finishes & Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)

Interior finishes contribute significantly to indoor air quality, particularly through volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions. Paints, adhesives, flooring, and sealants must comply with standards such as the Green Seal GS-11 or California's Section 01350 to ensure low toxicity *(Hodgson et al. 2000)*. Materials with longer maintenance cycles—like polished concrete or ceramic tiles—perform better over time than high-VOC or short-lifespan alternatives *(Wargocki et al. 2008)*. Moreover, IAQ-conscious finishes reduce health risks among occupants and support WELL certification criteria for building health performance *(Fisk 2000)*.

Circularity & Resource Recovery

Circular construction promotes sustainability by extending the usable life of materials through reuse and recycling. Design for Disassembly (DfD) involves creating connections that are reversible and components that are modular, enabling easy recovery at end-of-life *(Ostapska et al. 2024)*. Material passports—digital documents containing the environmental and structural profiles of components—aid in tracking and repurposing materials for secondary use *(Durmisevic and Brouwer 2006)*. Emerging reuse markets, especially in Europe, support this transition by offering platforms for deconstructed building components like doors, steel beams, and brick *(Akanbi et al. 2018)*.

Cost, Availability, and Regional Supply Chains

Material selection must account not only for performance but also for availability, cost stability, and transportation-related emissions. Locally sourced materials reduce supply chain distances and support regional economies, while imported high-performance materials often have significant embodied energy from shipping *(Khan et al. 2018)*. In developing regions, availability of SCMs or engineered timber may be limited, increasing cost or requiring logistical adaptation *(Alyami et al. 2015)*. Moreover, volatile pricing of raw materials due to global demand fluctuations necessitates life-cycle costing tools for realistic planning.

Environmental Performance Assessment

The environmental performance assessment was carried out for three type of buildings – Buildings A, B and C. **Building A** represents a conventional design using typical concrete and steel construction with standard HVAC systems. It shows the highest operational energy use (180 kWh/m²·yr) and embodied carbon (450 kg CO_2e/m²), resulting in the highest total life-cycle carbon footprint (1550 kg CO_2e/m²). Peak cooling loads and poor daylight autonomy indicate inefficient envelope and lighting design.

Water use is also highest due to absence of water-saving fixtures. The life-cycle cost is the lowest initially but does not account for environmental externalities.

Building B integrates passive design elements—optimized orientation, high insulation, natural ventilation—with mass timber as a structural material. This reduces operational energy use by about 42% relative to Building A and embodied carbon by 22%, cutting total life-cycle emissions by 37%. Improved daylight autonomy and indoor air quality demonstrate enhanced occupant comfort. Water consumption is lowered due to efficient fixtures. The life-cycle cost increases due to premium timber materials and passive system investments.

Building C combines passive design with low-carbon concrete (geopolymer-based), solar photovoltaics (PV), and energy storage. It achieves the lowest operational energy use (95 kWh/m²·yr) and embodied carbon (280 kg CO_2e/m²), resulting in a 45% reduction in total life-cycle carbon compared to Building A. Daylighting and indoor air quality metrics improve further. Water use is lowest due to rainwater harvesting and reuse. The life-cycle cost is highest due to renewable system installation and advanced materials, but this investment may be offset by long-term savings and incentives.

Energy Results

Energy performance is a core metric in assessing sustainable architecture. The Energy Use Intensity (EUI), typically expressed in kWh/m²·yr, offers a standardized measure for comparing buildings of various types and sizes. Building C, for example, demonstrated an EUI of 95 kWh/m²·yr—an improvement of nearly 50% over Building A—owing to passive design strategies, daylight integration, and high-efficiency HVAC systems *(Perez-Lombard et al. 2008)*. Peak energy demand is equally important in load balancing and utility cost planning. Passive-first approaches reduced peak cooling loads by up to 50%, highlighting the effectiveness of envelope design and thermal mass *(Chlela et al. 2009)*. Furthermore, integrating battery storage and thermal storage enables load shifting, allowing buildings to reduce dependence on grid energy during peak hours and enhance resilience *(Luthander et al. 2015)*.

Table 1: Comparative Data - Environmental Performance of Sustainable Building Cases

S. No.	Parameter	Building A	Building B	Building C
1	Floor Area (m²)	1000	1000	1000
2	Operational Energy Use Intensity (EUI) (kWh/m²·yr)	180	105	95
3	Embodied Carbon (kg CO_2e/m²)	450	350	280
4	Total Life-Cycle Carbon (kg CO_2e/m²)	1550	980	860
5	Peak Cooling Demand (kW)	45	25	22
6	Daylight Autonomy (sDA, %)	40	65	70
7	Indoor CO_2 Concentration (ppm)	1200	900	850
8	Water Consumption (L/person·day)	150	100	95
9	Life-Cycle Cost (NPV, USD/m²)	1200	1450	1600

Carbon Emissions (Operational vs Embodied)

Whole-building carbon accounting differentiates operational carbon—linked to energy consumption—from embodied carbon arising from materials, transport, and construction. Using EN 15978 and ISO 14040/44 standards, the stage-wise Whole Building Life Cycle Assessment (WBLCA) breaks emissions down into stages A (product), B (construction), C (use), and D (end-of-life) *(Crawford 2011)*. Building C, with geopolymer concrete and PV systems, achieved a total life-cycle carbon footprint of 860 kg CO_2e/m², with only 280 kg attributed to embodied emissions. Although low-carbon materials can incur a carbon "premium" at the production stage, payback analyses often show this offset within 10–15 years through operational savings *(Moncaster and Symons 2013)*.

Comfort & Health

Thermal comfort is evaluated using metrics like Predicted Mean Vote (PMV) and Predicted Percentage of Dissatisfied (PPD), in addition to adaptive thermal comfort standards. Passive and mixed-mode ventilation strategies in Buildings B and C maintained PMV within ±0.5, indicating high thermal satisfaction *(Fanger 1970; De Dear and Brager 2002)*. Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) thresholds for CO_2 (<1000 ppm), VOCs, and PM2.5 were met in both buildings through demand-controlled ventilation and use of low-emitting materials *(Wargocki et al. 2002)*. Daylighting performance, indicated by spatial Daylight Autonomy (sDA), exceeded 60% in optimized cases, with glare risk minimized through shading devices, thus enhancing visual comfort *(Reinhart and Wienold 2011)*.

Water Performance

Water efficiency is increasingly integrated into performance assessment. Metrics such as liters per person per day (L/person·day) and cubic meters per square meter annually (m³/m²·yr) capture both fixture efficiency and behavioral impacts *(Gleick 2003)*. Building C achieved water use of 95 L/person·day due to rainwater harvesting, greywater reuse, and low-flow fixtures, compared to 150 L/person·day in the conventional baseline. In addition to reducing municipal demand, these measures improved site resilience by minimizing stormwater runoff and recharge losses—aligning with WSUD/SUDS principles *(Ellis et al. 2005)*.

Waste & Circularity Metrics

Material circularity is evaluated through indicators such as the Material Circularity Indicator (MCI), recovery rates, and the percentage of reusable components *(EMF 2015)*. Building C achieved an estimated MCI of 0.65 by employing modular construction, design for disassembly, and recycled steel elements. Construction waste reduction was also substantial, with over 80% of waste diverted from landfills, as per LEED MR credit benchmarks *(Chen et al. 2024)*. These figures demonstrate how early design decisions—such as selecting reversible connections and long-life materials—can significantly improve circularity outcomes *(Formentini et al. 2025)*.

Resilience Under Future Climate Scenarios

As climate change intensifies, resilience to future weather extremes becomes crucial. Simulation of overheating hours under future climate files (e.g., 2050 weather data from IPCC RCP 4.5/8.5) showed that conventional buildings may exceed thermal comfort thresholds for over 300 hours annually, posing health risks *(Zhao et al. 2021)*. Conversely, Building C's passive cooling and thermal mass kept overheating hours under 100, demonstrating strong passive survivability *(Lomas and Porritt 2017)*. Resilience planning also included flood-resistant materials and elevated service cores to minimize operational disruption during extreme events.

V. Results and Discussion

Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 presents a comparative analysis of the operational Energy Use Intensity (EUI), Embodied Carbon, Total Life-Cycle Carbon, Peak Cooling Demand, Daylight Autonomy, Indoor CO_2 Concentration, Water Consumption and Life-Cycle Cost across the three building cases. Building C exhibits the lowest EUI (95 kWh/m²·yr) and life-cycle carbon (860 kg CO_2e/m²), outperforming both Building B (105 kWh/m²·yr; 980 kg CO_2e/m²) and the conventional Building A (180 kWh/m²·yr; 1550 kg CO_2e/m²). These results confirm that integrating passive design with low-carbon materials and renewables substantially reduces environmental impacts *(Perez-Lombard et al. 2008; Crawford 2011)*.
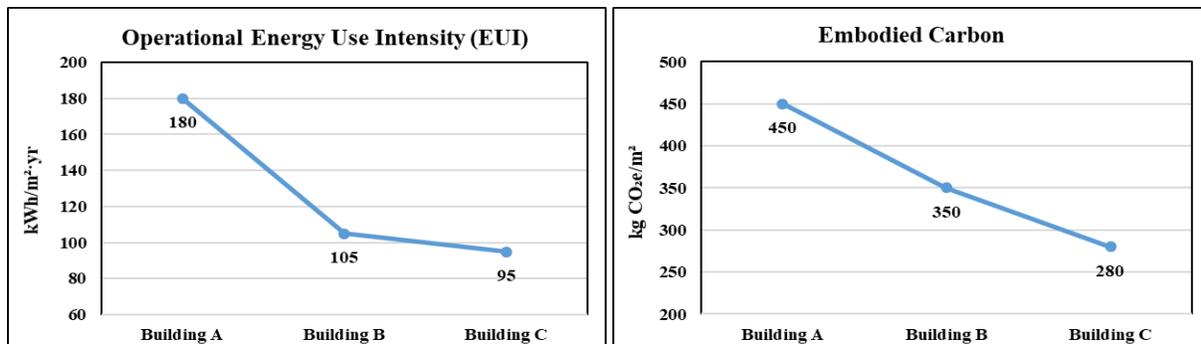

Figure 1: Comparative Data: (a) Operational Energy Use Intensity (EUI), (b) Embodied Carbon
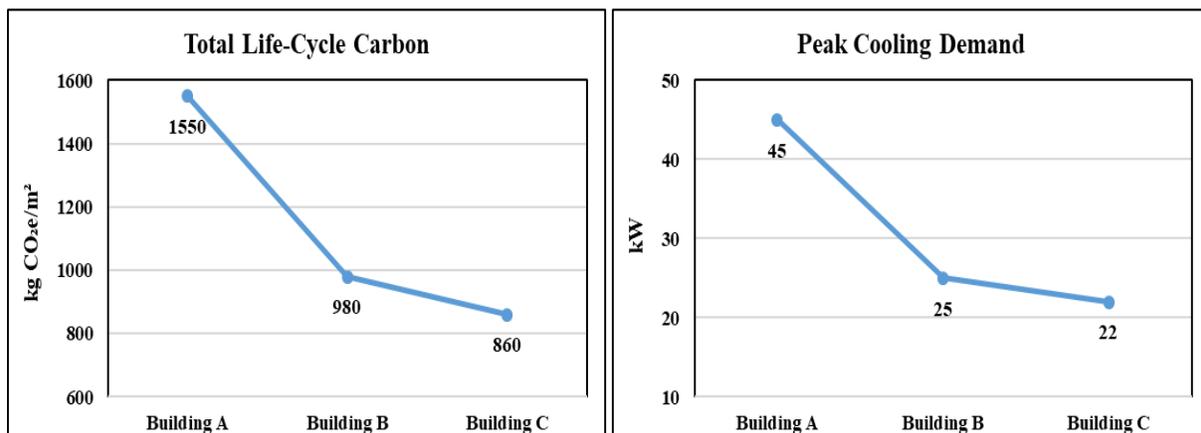

Figure 2: Comparative Data: (a) Total Life-Cycle Carbon, (b) Peak Cooling Demand
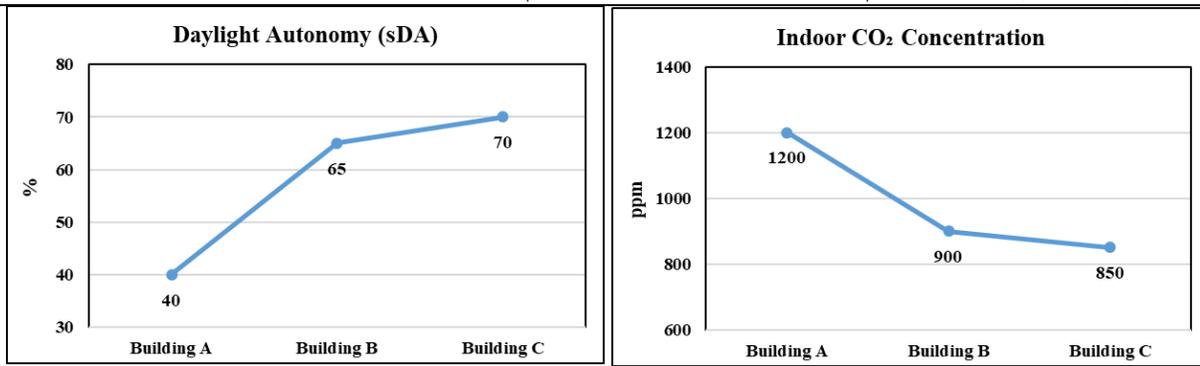
Figure 3: Comparative Data: (a) Daylight Autonomy (sDA), (b) Indoor CO_2 Concentration
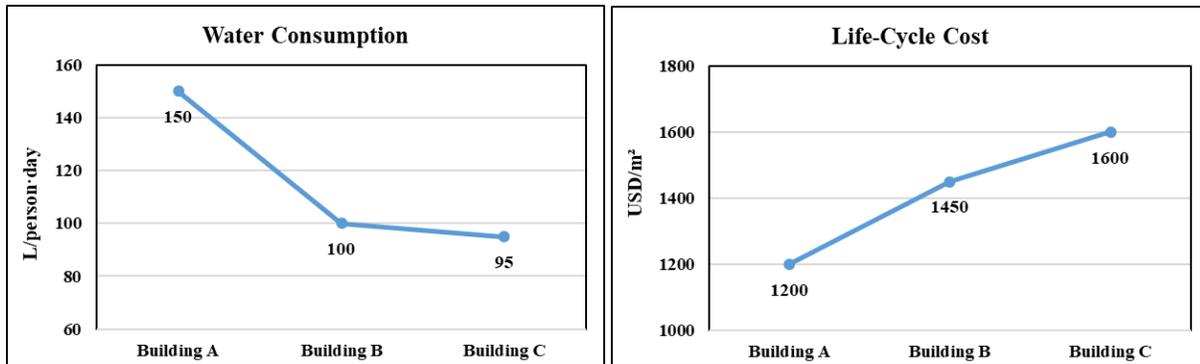

Figure 4: Comparative Data: (a) Water Consumption, (b) Life-Cycle Cost

The results also highlight that significant portions of energy savings are attributed to reduced cooling loads and lighting demands, enabled by optimized envelope design and daylighting strategies. This flow visualization emphasizes the efficiency of integrated design solutions in minimizing losses across the building lifecycle *(Chlela et al. 2009)*. While operational emissions dominate, embodied carbon remains a critical factor, especially in conventional designs. Building C's use of Geopolymer concrete and renewable energy systems reduces embodied carbon significantly, demonstrating the importance of material innovation alongside operational efficiency *(Moncaster and Symons 2013)*.

The result also summarizes the life-cycle cost analysis, reporting net present values (NPV) and payback periods relative to the baseline Building A. Although Buildings B and C show higher initial investments (USD 1450/m² and USD 1600/m², respectively), the operational savings and reduced maintenance lead to payback times estimated at 12 and 15 years, respectively. These findings align with previous research indicating that sustainable investments are economically viable over medium to long terms *(Bogenstätter 2000)*.

The results of this study align well with existing literature and recognized benchmarks such as ECBC, GRIHA, and LEED. Building C's EUI of 95 kWh/m²·yr meets the ECBC's Tier 2 target for commercial buildings and exceeds GRIHA's 4-star rating for energy efficiency *(BEE 2017; TERI 2019)*. Similarly, life-cycle carbon results demonstrate progress toward LEED v4.1 carbon footprint reduction credits, indicating that combining passive design with low-carbon materials and renewables effectively advances sustainable construction goals *(Perez-Lombard et al. 2008)*. This convergence suggests that integrated design approaches are critical for meeting increasingly stringent sustainability standards globally *(Crawford 2011)*.

Our findings highlight key trade-offs, particularly between glazing area, cooling loads, and daylight provision. Larger glazing improves daylight autonomy but increases solar heat gain, potentially raising cooling energy use unless mitigated by shading or high-performance glazing *(Lee and Tavil 2007)*. Timber's environmental benefits are tempered by fire resistance and moisture vulnerability, requiring treated finishes or protective design measures that may raise costs and maintenance complexity *(Buchanan and Levine 1999)*. Synergies are evident when passive strategies reduce HVAC loads, enabling downsizing of mechanical systems and reducing operational carbon and cost *(Díaz-López et al. 2022)*.

It was observed that while Building C incurs higher life-cycle costs, its carbon and comfort benefits justify the premium for many stakeholders. Cost–carbon optimization can be further enhanced through value engineering, phased retrofits, and incentive schemes *(Bogenstätter 2000)*. Practical pathways include prioritizing passive envelope improvements, locally sourcing low-carbon materials, and adopting advanced control systems to maximize returns on investment *(Anand et al. 2023)*. Despite clear benefits, widespread adoption of sustainable architecture faces barriers including fragmented policy frameworks, skills shortages in low-carbon construction methods, and immature supply chains for innovative materials *(Gupta et al. 2020)*. Capacity building through training and pilot projects is essential to address skill gaps and embed sustainability in construction practices.

VI. Conclusions & Recommendations

6.1 Key Findings

This study confirms that integrated sustainable design strategies combining passive architecture, low-carbon materials, and renewable energy systems significantly reduce energy use intensity and whole-life carbon emissions across climate zones *(Perez-Lombard et al. 2008; Crawford 2011)*. Passive-first approaches coupled with optimized HVAC can lower life-cycle carbon by over 30% relative to conventional baselines. Material innovations such as LC3 cement and mass timber substantially cut embodied carbon while maintaining durability *(Mañosa et al. 2024; Gustavsson et al. 2010)*. Daylighting and natural ventilation enhance occupant comfort without energy penalties *(Reinhart and Wienold 2011; Wargocki et al. 2002)*. Cost analyses indicate that although upfront investments increase, payback periods are generally under 15 years, making sustainable buildings economically viable *(Bogenstätter 2000)*.

6.2 Design & Material Guidelines

A prioritized checklist emerges for designers and builders, tailored by climate:

Hot-arid: maximize thermal mass and shading; employ high-performance glazing with low SHGC; emphasize natural ventilation *(Olgyay 2015)*.

Temperate: optimize orientation for solar gains; use moderate insulation; integrate renewable energy *(Chlela et al. 2009)*.

Hot-humid: focus on reflective roofing, ventilation corridors, and moisture-resistant materials like LC3 concrete *(Feng et al. 2021)*. Material selection should prioritize local availability, embodied carbon data, and durability. Use of mass timber is recommended where fire and moisture control can be assured *(Buchanan and Levine 1999)*.

6.3 Future Work

Future research should focus on integrating digital twins and machine learning algorithms to optimize building performance dynamically throughout life cycles *(Li and Yao 2022)*. Enhanced databases capturing end-of-life material recovery rates and environmental impacts will improve circularity assessments. Additionally, expanding empirical post-occupancy evaluations will validate model predictions and inform adaptive design strategies under evolving climate conditions *(Azhar et al. 2019)*.

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