Editorial

How have the institutes imparting architecture education in India responded to a few key features of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 such as emphasis on student-centric, flexible and multi-modal learning? The policy recommends a system in which a student would have freedom to choose what and how she wants to learn, allowing lateral movements between disciplines, mix and match of courses, and blended learning which is a combination of face-to-face with online modes. The University Grant Commission (UGC) also calls for a using a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning tools. The UGC has been advocating reforms such as blended learning and flipped classrooms for many years now.

Then, we have been having distant learning facility in the form of open universities for many years. National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) has proven to be of a huge value, offering a means for self-learning and continuous development for students and graduates alike. Many have taken issues with some other points of the NEP, however, most experts agree with the features of multimodal teaching-learning. Moreover, the very recent pandemic experience that forced education to go online has thrown up many new ways of communication and learning that were simply not thought of earlier.

At present, it appears that we have put the pandemic behind us. Normalcy has returned and so has the earlier status quo in the ways of functioning. In general, judging by the common chatter, there has been a tendency to decry the entire experience of online teaching as entirely negative and

detrimental. Quite a few questionnaire surveys were floated in which one could see the researchers' bias. Many good and productive things came out in this period because the education became de-centralised and free from the usual control mechanisms of a physical classroom. The senior students particularly benefitted from having a greater autonomy of time and invested it in self-learning from many diverse sources than earlier. The schools could invite speakers and mentors from across the world and the students could bring in their own native town specific context when the design studios were not tied down to a single site. Students, working individuals and public at large took advantage of a large number of online lectures and short courses floated by educational and cultural organisations. Learning flowed freely for those willing to take it and even gave them succour from the hard times.

There is a need for a serious and unbiased discussion on this so that the lessons learnt in hard times are not thrown away casually. That architecture education and practice in India both need reforms to improve the quality is undeniable. There is a wide gap between policies and practice at ground level. One would think that a greater access to technology will lead to shorten it.

Flexibility or freedom as espoused in the NEP is understood to be closely related to use of technology, but this need not be so always; and can be looked at separately while aiming for an improvement in quality. Very often we see that technology is used to impose a uniform order and regimentation that impedes freewheeling and independent thought. While the architectural production, and here I mean, design and construction drawings, have almost completely gone digital in urban India, we can hardly say that it has improved the quality of built environment. In the schools also, even a fresh student of architecture is now more and more adept with using technology to produce her studio work. A majority of teachers use ICT in classrooms even if it is largely confined to power-point presentations. Can we say with any confidence that these by themselves have helped improve the quality of teaching?

Digital technologies will continue to play an increasing role in our life and in academia. They should be seen as enablers rather than guarantors of flexibility and quality. Mahyar Arefi and Amir Tayyebi in this issue have talked about the joys of self-discovery that their students experienced in an online studio. This is an important insight. The mindset that a learner cannot be trusted to learn on their own is to be rejected. The schools and their teachers and students need not be tied down to a single location or source. For a system that has always emphasized study tours and site visits, looking beyond the four walls of a classroom should not appear to be a radical idea at all.

In this issue of Tekton, we feature the following:

Mahyar Arefi and **Amir Tayyebi** in their paper systematically document the entire process of conducting an online urban design studio – right from the initial discussion to final conclusion. This makes for an interesting reading as it speaks to every teacher who passed through the uncertainty of the covid times and grappled to find creative methods. The paper is a valuable contribution to the literature on pedagogy during the pandemic. There is scarce documentation and theorization of design studio pedagogy, even in the regular mode, let alone in the online mode.

The 'Practice Essay' in this issue has **Sonam Ambe** and **Gita Balakrishnan** from Acedge writing about their journey of operating an e-learning platform for students of architecture, something that was a new paradigm in teaching architecture, but soon the COVID pandemic made everyone embrace it. The authors have shared experiences of their academic practice – of a kind which is not tied to a single location or source, affords numerous freedoms, and it is here to stay even if the schools have switched back to the physical mode.

Kavita Pradhan in her essay creates a concise overview of the current state of architecture education in India where she draws a dismal picture barring a few islands of excellence. This undoubtedly is related to the quality of young graduates, teachers, the profession and indeed that of the built environment mushrooming in our cities. She analyses the attributes of quality in higher education and advocates a need for urgent reforms that may enable the educational institutes to become centres of excellence.

Pritam Ahirrao in his paper has created a framework for studying public open spaces through the lens of space responsiveness – a concept that puts the user in the centre in terms how they use, perceive and interpret a space. The paper proposes Space Responsive Index (SRI) to measure responsiveness of such spaces at the individual, community, and environmental levels. The author has used the framework to analyse a few public open spaces in Nagpur where he shows the factors why any given space fares better than the other in quantitative terms.

Pooja Ugrani in her paper puts forth various factors that affect the expression of ownership at the entrances of houses in community living in urban India and makes a case for the existence of this very pertinent architectural element in the mutating housing typologies of the future.

In this issue, we carry a review of William Elison's *The Neighborhood of Gods: The Sacred and the Visible at the Margins of Mumbai* by **Bhagyasshree Ramakrishna** who finds it a compelling ethnographic study

of Mumbai's marginalised communities and their urban spatial religious practices. The city of Mumbai is a veritable goldmine for finding sub-altern expressions of the sacred on streets, nooks and crannies that lay claim on public in myriad ways.

We invite teachers and architects to write and share innovations they carried out in their respective practices during the pandemic period, so that more of us can learn from them.

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Photo courtesy: Smita Dalvi

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