

Editorial



The processes of Urban Planning in our country are found at variance with the lived experiences of the city dwellers, their cultural predilections, and also their hard-pressed needs. One of the reasons is that Urban Planning is a top down, zoomed out approach of map-making and drawing lines, driven by deterministic ideas that more often fail in implementation.

On-ground reality in most Indian cities of various tiers is far from what the planners imagined them to be. Most unfortunate aspect is poor walkability and accessibility. Where majority of trips are conducted on foot, it is inconceivable that we don't have decent walking infrastructure – clean and level footpaths, sloped curbs, pedestrian crossings, on grade walking etc. How alive are our cities towards the needs of elderly and child population? When the streets and public transport infrastructure is hard to navigate and negotiate, the elderly suffer the most. They have to either remain confined to homes or have to depend on others if they wish to travel within the city. Simple joys of walking to the market for daily needs becomes an ordeal due to poor walkability.

The Danish urban planner Jan Gehl in his *Cities for People* asserts that the human dimension is most vital in planning and designing a city. He speaks of four simple objectives for a city – that they be lively, safe, healthy and sustainable. This should be simple to achieve, they don't need heavy outlays, only if the focus is on people. In this issue, the authors have drawn our attention to some of these aspects of the city. While Madhavi Patil talks about perceived density of lived experience where denseness can translate to liveliness, Pradnya Patki and Sushma Parashar advocate achieving liveliness in a street character by recognising cultural and heritage features of traditional cities. Amita Sinha talks about child-friendliness that ensures clean air and open spaces for a healthy city. Varssni Karthik suggests to learn from other media how spatial configurations can make the city unsafe and thus ways of making safe cities.

In this issue, we feature the following:

Amita Sinha in her essay, *Cities for Children*, argues that children's rights to play should be taken into account in designing a child-friendly city, both at the micro- and macro-scale. In rapidly urbanising Indian cities, there is a

push for high-rise housing and multi-storey compact school buildings. Sinha rightly cautions about the perils of neglecting the needs of children to spend time outdoors for play and recreation. She also advocates for the public institutions to devise spaces and programs such that the city can become a child friendly learning environment.

Varssni Karthik in her paper has presented an interesting methodology for urban studies that crosses discipline into cinema. She focuses on urban crime and argues that spatial configuration of the city has a role to play. In her paper, she has analysed the portrayal of Gotham city an unsafe crime-thriving city in the Batman films with the aim of deriving pointers for urban crime instigators. Her study finds patterns across three Batman films from 1989, 2012, and 2022 concerning Gotham's urban character providing useful clues to understand urban crime and potential spatial mitigators.

Madhavi Patil in her paper investigates perception of density in urban environments. It highlights the limitations of traditional, purely objective density metrics and argues for a more comprehensive approach that integrates subjective factors. Through extensive survey of literature, she examines the perception of densities from several angles. Urban planning can benefit by acknowledging how urban societies experience and interpret density, rather than relying solely on objective measures. In saying this, she advocates for the creation of more user-centric, sustainable cities that enhance residents' quality of life.

Pradnya Patki and **Sushama Parashar** in their paper have systematically documented methodology of a design studio that consciously explored the question of study of historical architecture and its relevance to the contemporary practice. They experimented to see if there could be productive integration between the courses of history and design in the architectural curriculum. For this, they chose the study of Bohrawad in Siddhpur, a former trade centre in the state of Gujarat. The chosen neighbourhood has streets lined with mansions whose architecture is a blend of vernacular and European features with a striking urban Presence. The paper discusses the outcome of the design studio in which the lessons were carried forward.

Mustansir Dalvi in his essay pays a loving tribute to Balkrishna Doshi, the doyen of Indian modern. When he was conferred with the Pritzker in 2018, architecture's greatest honour, the jury celebrated his work as one that embodied a deep sense of responsibility and a desire to contribute to his country and its people through high-quality, authentic architecture. Over a career spanning seven decades, In Dalvi's words, Doshi was a modernist, a designer of settlements, an Aga Khan Award winning architect, a creator of low-cost housing and a teacher with generations of students whose lives he transformed. This last bit is most significant in my reckoning, because as an

educator Doshi's value were not just his but multiplied in Ahmedabad and other cities where his students practiced.

Jinu Kurien has reviewed the Biome Diaries – a chronicle in three parts of a multi-faceted architectural practice, Biome Environmental solutions, led by Chitra Vishwanath. He describes how the makers of the diaries have experimented with the form, coming up with altogether a new way of archiving, different from a conventional monograph. He says that it is the same spirit of teamwork and free expression guiding the works of Biome that animates the small handy volumes.

Tekton Journal invites young and experienced architects and researchers to contribute their work to add to the ongoing discourse on our cities and make it rich.

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Photograph by Smita Dalvi