TUR

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The Urban Rhetoric

Innovature Research and Design Studio

About IRDS

Innovature Research and Design Studio (IRDS) is an interdisciplinary creative practice, trying to weave diverse realms such as architecture, urban fabric and user aspirations into a distinctive pattern of thoughtful design.

THE URBAN RHETORIC

About TUR

"The Urban Rhetoric" is a bi-annual initiative by Innovature Research and Design Studio [IRDS] to create a platform for discussion and act as a catalyst in recreating the future of urbanism and urban development in India.

We aim to do so with the help of an academic magazine with essays that inspire the agenda for future urbanism. A city is not just defined by the planners and architects that build it, but also by the users that occupy it. Thus, through this initiative we strive to make these parallels meet by reinforcing the interactions between decision makers and users. This magazine crusading towards the agenda for future urbanism aims to provide a platform for dialogue and discussions on growth and development in Indian cities.

Team TUR

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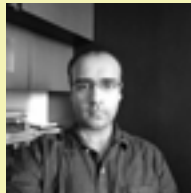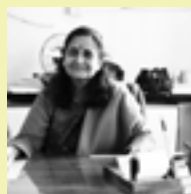*Founder , Editor*

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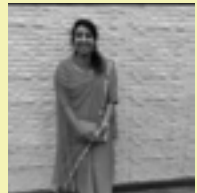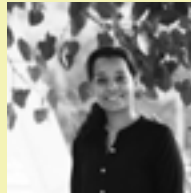
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Towards an understanding of adaptive reuse architecture

Source: Author

Adaptive reuse architecture has had conflicting arguments regarding its role, existence, and efficiency. One such conflict is between the designer's vision and the user's needs. The use of any design for anything other than its intended use has been contested for the integrity of architecture itself. Although there is a need for discourse in this assertion, there resides a constant opposition in the evolution of any architecture. The same goes for a growing city especially a historic one, with its architecture shrouded behind the curtains of growth, development, and the espousing of modern life. Despite the raising constructive scrutiny towards this embrace of modern life, there still lingers a fallacy pertaining to the promises of modern life.

The argument that regards this fallacy to be one of sunk costs however is facing its scrutiny. This is especially true for uses that are of commercial nature, defined by their revenue generation This eventually results in a binary that lacks constructiveness towards the advancement of the field of adaptive reuse architecture. This can be picked up easily from several arguments, be it the CIAM's regarding of cities destroyed by war as opportunities for an unshackling from a cramped past or be it the readily available examples that witnessed the retrofitting of designed space to accommodate changing needs. Although we are far past the scenarios of war-torn cities, there still exist the centers of historic cities, that are subjected to the changes that have resulted from our changing lifestyles.

Urban centers of historical cities, apart from being the commercial pot of the greater city to which it belongs, are also the regions that exhibit a diversity of architectural styles with a composition made of contrasting old and new. Studies of such historical cities have yielded an acknowledgment of the conflict between the two. A deconstruction of this binary to enable the emergence of the numerous possibilities from the spectrum that exists between the two will lead to a non-zero sum game which will enable the advancement of adaptive reuse architecture in a way that is in accordance with the growth of the historic city. One major criticism from the mid-20th century towards the inchoate paradigm of adaptive reuse architecture was about the nostalgia that was carried along with the drive for the reuse of these historic architectural styles. This can be discerned from the criticisms towards the reinhabiting of Ponte Vecchio and the ensuing rebuilding of the region that surrounded the bridge. However, such criticisms subdued with the discourse that arose during the late 20th century with polemics that discussed the need for an understanding of the diverse nuances of urban life rather than a blind adherence to the glorification of the metropolis. These arguments can be regarded as the ones that laid the steps for an urban design framework that would later evolve into something that is inclusive of the idea of adaptive reuse. A discourse is significantly needed since an inclination towards any one of the contesting sides can only be superficial and unyielding. With that acknowledged, the further approach is towards a contemplation of the inadvertently occurring adaptive reuse, that carries on without any oversight of either the original designer or any other designer. In order for an establishment of constructive discourse regarding these conflicting interests, there needs to be an understanding of the role played by adaptive reuse architecture in the weaving of the tapestry of the urban form. One of the incipient moves toward such an understanding is to analyze the viability of such adapted spaces and the subsequent influences these spaces have on the region to

Source: Author

which they belong. This region encompasses the microscale and mesoscale fragments of the urban environment. As many as three major elements that contribute to the form of a prototypical urban region can be enumerated. These include the urban plot, the urban block, and the street.The ways in which the adapted architecture influences these elements provide for an exhibition of the significance that adaptive reuse can have in the regeneration of the historic center into the polis that is expected to support modern life. An intramural study of such inadvertently adapted architecture has yielded a distinctive relationship between form and function. The conflict between the two is an ongoing one with regard to what holds a greater position during the design process. Adapted architecture witnesses a reciprocal influence between the architecture and the function of the building. This is especially true of the examples that are adapted for new uses without the oversight of a designer and are carried out by the immediate use of the space. Compromises are made along both sides to bring forth the most viable functioning of the space. This will prove to be useful with an accomplished understanding

that would push our current pedagogy to move past the integrity of either the architecture or the function alone. The most immediate step in this journey may be towards the integrity of the place in question rather than the many fragments of it. Although there is a considerably exponential diversification in the definition of architecture to include the perceptual imagery among many more, there is also this need for the rejection of the association of architecture with monumentality and the manipulation of perception to create such monuments.The other fight adaptive reuse has to put up with is one between reused architecture and rebuilt architecture.This is the scenario for the urban centers where the milieu is dominated by spaces of commercial land use. The option to reuse is overlooked with the spaces that are valued for their revenue generation capabilities. Although the wave of rapid growth can be held responsible for this, a lack of discussion and discourse on the idea should also be taken into consideration. The prevailing economic condition might be the one forcing the overlook of the need for the evolution of the paradigm. But growth can only be achieved when the idea of adaptive reuse is regarded to be a part of the reciprocal contributions between place and man.

'Adapted architecture witnesses a reciprocal influence between the architecture and the function of the building.'

Al Mariam Ul Aasia Kamal Basha

Al Mariam Ul Aasia Kamal Basha

Mariam is a recent architecture graduate currently working as an architect in India. To rethink and reconsider the aspects of architecture and urban fabric and to strive not towards excellence but a collective essential is what motivates her work. The collective being an intersection between art, architecture, history, literature, and culture. She seeks to further her education with a masters in Urban studies.

The changing relationship between land and water

Rising Sea Level is one of the direct impacts of Climate Change, the coastal city Karachi in Pakistan faces. This is an investigation into ways interventions can be designed and implemented adhering to the approach of adaptation.

Rather than separation of nature from the urban environment, this prototype looks into embracing the change in water levels. In 2019, Karachi faced flooding due to heavy monsoon rains, which interrupted accessibility for an area called Neher-e-Khayyam. This area comprises of two parallel streets separated by a kilometre long water channel. This channel, initially carried clean water, but is currently contaminated by sewage discharge. This study is a look into revitalising the channel for public use. Making it a fundamental part of the urban environment, the landscape, and housing typology have been proposed as a flexible plug-in prototype adapting to both temporary and permanent flooding as time progresses.
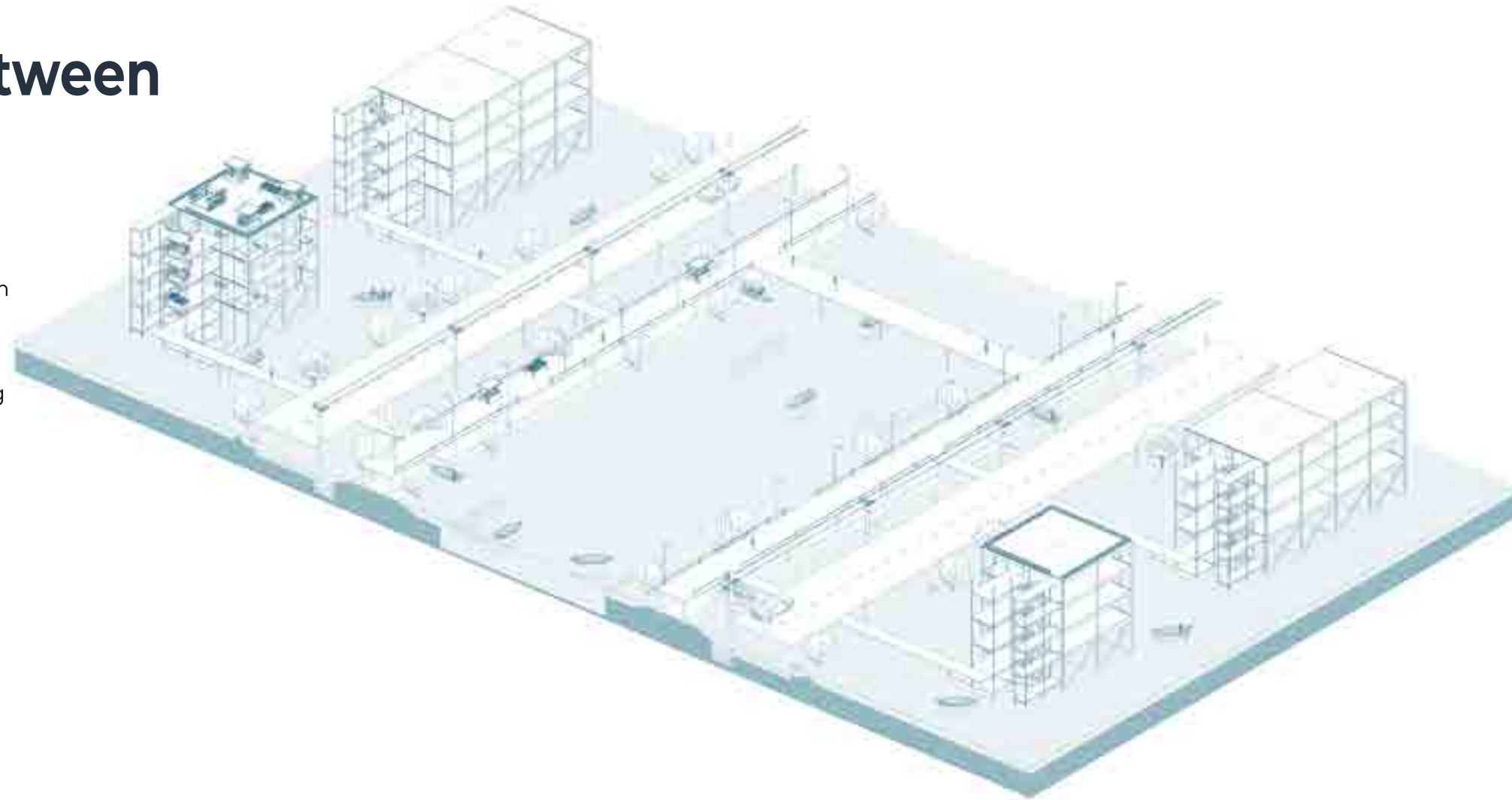
Huzefah Haroon

Huzefah Haroon is an architect and an educator. She started her independent practice by the name of Anomaly Lab in 2021, with the vision to balance research, experimentation, and design, to create meaningful experiences. She is currently exploring possibilities of interdisciplinarity within architecture and how her practice can create more hybrid ways think and solve design problems. Her interest in design thinking and conversations led her to become a part of Design United – India in 2020, which further inculcated the interest to actively be involved within the academia. Huzefah has been a faculty at the University of Karachi where she co-taught second year design studio to architecture students, and is currently teaching at her alma mater Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture.
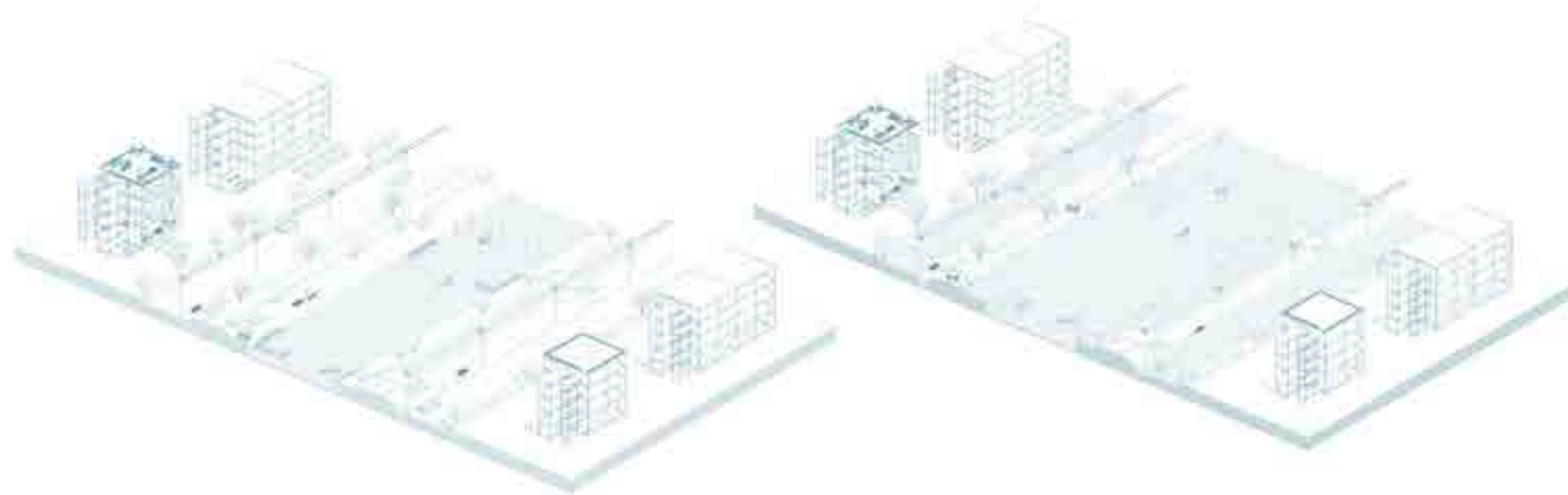
Richmond's African American burial ground memorial and Interstate's I-95 corridor park:
on memory, infrastructure and community empowerment"

This research project explores the planned and unplanned impacts of racially insensitive highway expansion policies, community resistance to those policies, and remedial actions taken to make and mend Richmond's African American Burial Ground Memorial and Corridor Park. Federal highway expansion projects of the mid-20th century ripped through minority and immigrant communities across the country.

'The cultural legacy of the neighborhood is celebrated while the socio-economic and environmental livelihoods and well-being of the community are being restored.'

In Richmond (Virginia), Interstate Highway 95's planning resulted in six miles of the neighborhood being demolished. Today, the Interstate Highway 95's planned expansion is ultimately halted by multi-city com-munity action to reverse the chronic highway segregation that the neighborhood faced and to reclaim the cultural relic (Richmond's African American Burial Ground) that is projected to be cemented beneath the Interstate's planned expansion.

By reclaiming this segregated cultural relic and stitching it back into the neighborhood while advocating for a broader remedial socio-economic and environmental intervention through a connected urban infra-structural network of community gardens, playgrounds, bike paths, subway lines, and new job-creating incubators, the cultural legacy of the neighborhood is celebrated while the socio-economic and environmental livelihoods and well-being of the community are being restored.

The project was partially developed as part of Columbia University's M Sc in Architecture and Urban Design curriculum (Urban Design Seminar: Cotton Kingdom, now/Spring 2020) under the supervision of the Adjunct Assistant Professor Sara Zewde)

Eleni Stefania

Eleni Stefania

Eleni Stefania is a New York-based Architect and Urban Designer (M Sc in Architecture & Urban Design/Columbia GSAPP'20), focused on the interactions between water bodies and urbanism as well as the regeneration of de-industrialized landscapes through living infrastructure. A people-first approach drives her work, consonant with the deep context of a place, its scale, its materiality, its broader environmental-socio political, and economic agendas, and flexible to adapt to long-term future growth.

Black burial ground in Richmond, Virginia
[Visual Literary Analysis]

Slave population Census 1867

One Sunday afternoon he followed "a ...funeral procession" led by "a decent hearse" and coaches to observe several dozen black men and women arriving at "a desolate place, where a dozen colored people were already engaged heaping the earth over the grave of a child." Olmsted described those heaping the earth as singing, in his loaded words, "a wild kind of chant." Olmsted then noticed that a new grave had been dug immediately alongside that of the child. Both lay "near the foot of a hill, in a crumbling bank—the ground below being already occupied, and the graves apparently advancing in terraces up the hill- side.'"

F.L.Olmsted 1853

Burial Ground

Physiography

Black burial ground in Richmond, Virginia
[Cotton Kingdom, Then & Cotton Kingdom, Now]

Then

Now
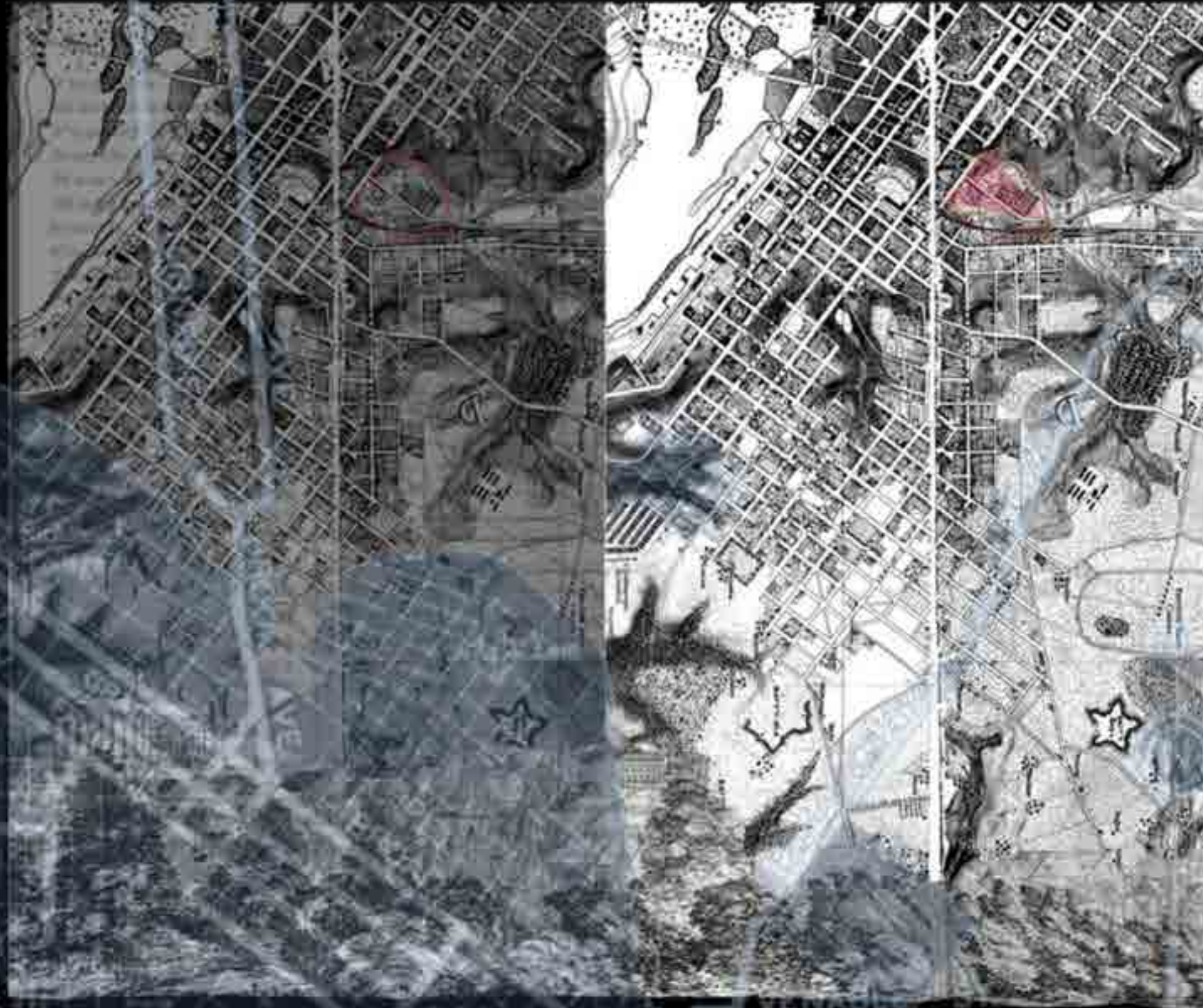
Black burial ground in Richmond, Virginia
[Re-presenting the Kingdom]
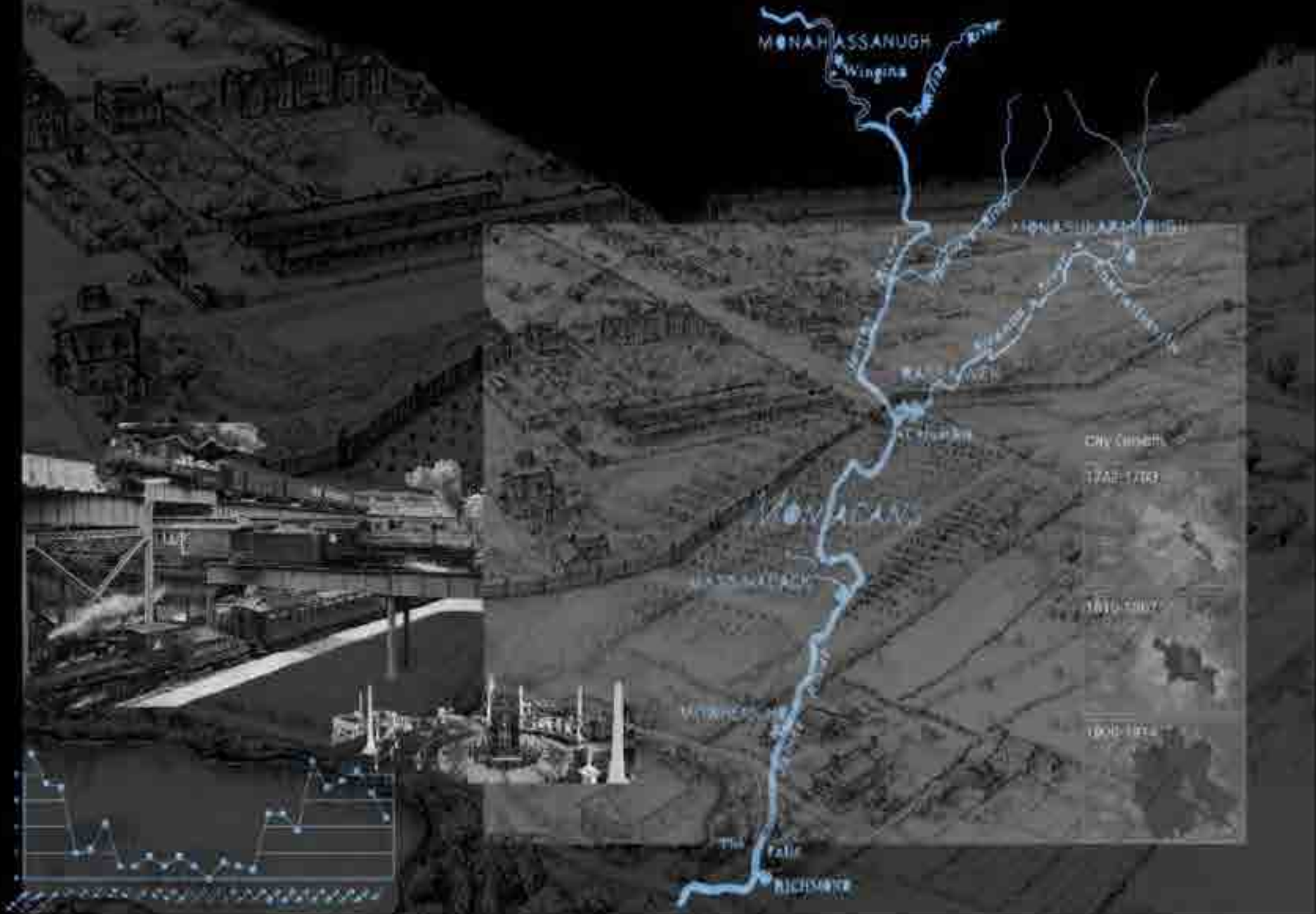
Image & Research Credits: Eleni Stefania Kalapoda (The project was partially developed as part of Columbia University's M Sc in Architecture and Urban Design curriculum (Urban Design Seminar: Cotton Kingdom, now/Spring 2020) under the supervision of the Adjunct Assistant Professor Sara Zewde)

The power of community-led initiatives in building social cohesion in urban india

1. Introduction

India's cities are diverse and dynamic, with people from different backgrounds, cultures, and economic strata living and working together. However, this diversity can also lead to social divisions and exclusion, which can create tensions and undermine the sense of community and belonging in urban areas. To address these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need to build stronger social cohesion in India's cities, with a focus on community-led initiatives and interventions

Community-led initiatives can play a critical role in promoting social cohesion by creating opportunities for people to come together, build relationships, and work towards common goals. These initiatives can range from neighbourhood-level projects to city-wide campaigns, and can focus on a variety of issues, from environmental sustainability to social inclusion and economic empowerment

FIGURE 1 CITY NATURE IS BEING CO-CREATED BY CHILDREN

India's initiative:

One example of a community-led initiative that is promoting social cohesion in India is the "**Street Smart**" project in Mumbai. This project was launched in 2017 by a group of local residents who wanted to create a safer and more welcoming environment in their neighbourhood. They began by cleaning up the streets and public spaces, and then organized a series of community events, including street festivals, art exhibits, and cultural performances. The Street Smart project has created a sense of ownership and pride among local residents, who are now more invested in the well-being of their neighbourhood.

Another example of a community-led initiative that is promoting social cohesion in India is the "**Waste Warriors**" project in Dehradun. This project was launched in 2012 by a group of local volunteers who were concerned about the environmental and social impact of waste in their city. They began by organizing community clean-up drives and then expanded their efforts to include waste segregation and recycling programs. Through this initiative, the Waste Warriors project has created a sense of community and shared responsibility among local residents, who are now working together to create a more sustainable and equitable city.

FIGURE 2 WASTE WARRIORS POST-PROJECT IN HIMACHAL, INDIA

The street smart project helped to break down social barriers and promote inclusivity, with people from different backgrounds and communities coming together to participate in the events and activities, whereas the waste warriors project has helped to promote social inclusion, with marginalized communities and low-income residents benefiting from the improved waste management services.

These examples highlight the importance of community-led initiatives in promoting social cohesion in India's cities. By empowering local residents to take ownership of their neighbourhoods and work towards common goals, these initiatives can help to build stronger and more inclusive communities. However, there is still much work to be done to scale up and replicate these initiatives in other cities and neighbourhoods, and to ensure that they are sustainable and effective over the long term.

Paragon of social cohesion plan:

Nørrebro is a diverse neighbourhood in Copenhagen, with a mix of ethnicities, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, the neighbourhood has also experienced social divisions and tensions in the past, particularly between Danish residents and immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa.
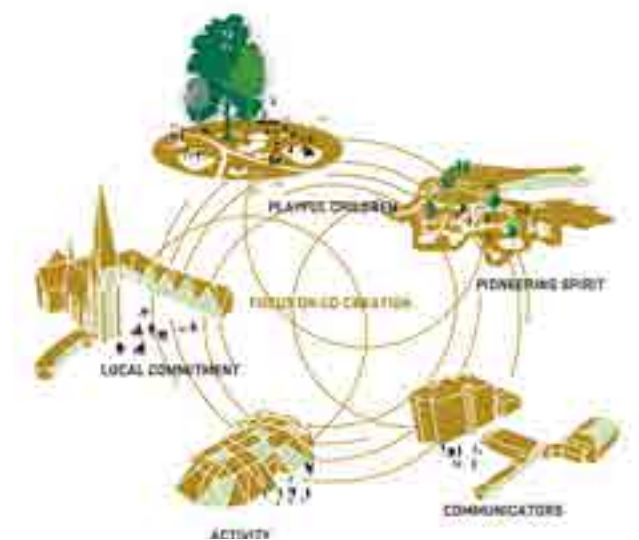
FIGURE 3 THE SOCIAL CYCLE OF NORREBO, COPENHAGEN

To address these challenges, the local government and community organizations in Nørrebro have implemented a range of initiatives to promote social cohesion and inclusivity. These initiatives include community festivals, public art projects, and programs that provide opportunities for youth from different backgrounds to interact and build relationships

One example of a community-led initiative in Nørrebro is the "Loppemarked" flea market, which is organized by local residents and attracts people from across the city. The flea market provides a space for people to socialize, exchange goods, and build relationships, breaking down social barriers and promoting inclusivity in the neighbourhood.

FIGURE 3 THE SOCIAL CYCLE OF NORREBO, COPENHAGEN
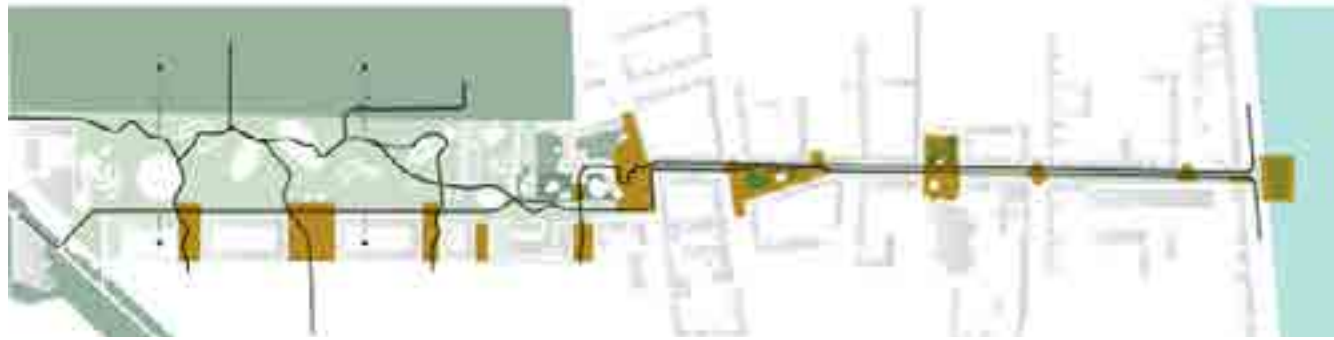
Both the physical and visual links between Hans Tavsens Park, Korsgade and their context will be improved so that the area is made more accessible, both physically and mentally.

Another example of a community-led initiative in Nørrebro is the "Superkilen" park, which was designed with input from local residents and features elements that reflect the diverse cultures and histories of the neighbourhood. The park includes a Moroccan fountain, a Thai boxing ring, and benches from Brazil, among other features, creating a space that is both inclusive and representative of the neighbourhood's diverse communities.

In conclusion, the case examples of Nørrebro and Mumbai illustrate the important role that community-led initiatives can play in promoting social cohesion and inclusivity in urban areas. By providing opportunities for people to come together, build relationships, and work towards common goals, these initiatives can create stronger, more resilient communities that are better equipped to address the challenges of urban living.

FIGURE 6 POCKET PARKS & GREEN ROOFS, NORREBO

FIGURE 5 AREA MAP SHOWING LINKS IN NORREBO

Practical approach:

Implementing the Nørrebro social cohesion plan in India:

1.　Community-led initiatives: Encourage the formation of community-led initiatives in Indian cities, where residents can take an active role in shaping the development of their neighbourhoods and the city as a whole. These initiatives could focus on issues like community building, improving public spaces, or environmental sustainability.

2.　Pedestrian and cycling infrastructure: Develop more pedestrian-friendly and cycling-friendly infrastructure in Indian cities, as Nørrebro has done. This could include initiatives like bike lanes, pedestrian zones, and traffic-calmed areas.

3.　Green spaces: Encourage the development of green spaces in Indian cities, like parks, community gardens, and urban forests. These spaces could be used for recreational activities, community events, and environmental education.

4.　Diversity and inclusion: Emphasize the importance of diversity and inclusion in urban planning and design. This could include initiatives like promoting mixed-income housing developments, ensuring access to public spaces for all residents, and prioritizing the needs of marginalized communities.

5.　Participatory budgeting: Implement participatory budgeting in Indian cities, where residents have a direct say in how public funds are spent. This could help ensure that resources are allocated in a way that reflects the needs and priorities of the community.

6.　Collaborative decision-making: Encourage collaborative decision-making between residents, local government, and other stakeholders in urban planning and design. This could include initiatives like citizen juries or participatory design workshops.

Implications:

Potential merits and demerits of implementing the Nørrebro case study model in Indian cities:

Merits:

1.　Improved social cohesion and community building: Implementing community-led initiatives in Indian cities can help create stronger, more inclusive communities and build trust between different groups.
2.　Enhanced public participation: Community-led initiatives can encourage residents to take an active role in shaping the development of their neighbourhoods and cities.
3.　Greater sense of ownership: By involving residents in the design and implementation of urban space initiatives, they can develop a sense of ownership and responsibility for their communities and spaces.
4.　More sustainable and environmentally-friendly spaces: Nørrebro's focus on sustainability and green spaces could be adapted to Indian cities, which are facing increasing environmental challenges.

Demerits:

1.　Resistance to change: Implementing community-led initiatives may face resistance from existing power structures and entrenched interests.
2.　Limited resources: Many community-led initiatives require significant resources, which may be difficult to secure in the context of limited budgets and competing priorities.
3.　Difficulties in scaling up: Community-led initiatives may be successful on a small scale, but it can be challenging to scale them up to the city or regional level.
4.　Cultural differences: The success of the Nørrebro model may be partly due to cultural factors unique to Denmark, which may not translate perfectly to Indian contexts.

India's paragon of social cohesion- auroville and ODOP

Auroville- One example of a successful urban space in India is Auroville, a planned town located near Pondicherry in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Auroville was founded in 1968 with the vision of creating a harmonious and sustainable community that transcends national, cultural, and religious boundaries

FIGURE 7 BASIC ZONING CONCEPT OF AUROVILLE, INDIA

In terms of safety, Auroville has a low crime rate and a strong sense of community, with residents working together to maintain a safe and secure environment. The town also has a green belt area surrounding it, which provides a buffer zone between the town and the surrounding rural areas and helps to maintain a peaceful and secure environment.

ODOP- India's One District, One Product (ODOP) initiative aims to promote the traditional industries and crafts of each district in the country, to create jobs and economic opportunities, and preserve the cultural heritage of the regions. This initiative is seen as a way to contribute to social cohesion, as it can help to empower local communities and preserve local identities.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, while implementing the Nørrebro case study model in Indian cities could offer many benefits in terms of building social cohesion and inclusive communities, it is important to be aware of the potential challenges and limitations of this approach.

Any implementation should be adapted to the specific cultural and social context of the city, and a collaborative and participatory approach should be taken to ensure buy-in from all stakeholders. By emphasizing community-led initiatives, pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, green spaces, diversity and inclusion, participatory budgeting, and collaborative decision-making, Indian cities can work towards building stronger social cohesion and more inclusive communities.

Credits:

Figure 1: John M. Maternoski, Urban Growth in Copenhagen.
Figure 2: www. waste warriors .org
Figure 3 & 6: digitalcommons.colby.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1852&context=clas
Figure 4: Creator: Iwan Baan, Source: Bjarke Ingels Group: BIG
Figure 5: worldbank.org/archive/website01419/WEB/IMAGES/050112_U.PDF
Figure 7: auroville.org/page/galaxy-concept-of-the-city

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Eshanpreet Kaur Khalsa

Eshanpreet Kaur, a dedicated architect with over 6 years of experience in the field. She is passionate for architecture and urban research, theory, and sustainability. Eshanpreet completed her bachelor's degree in 2016 and pursued her post-graduation in urban planning, followed by PG in sustainable science. Her expertise and education have earned her many accolades throughout her career, including award-winning poet recognition from IGBC for her sustainable poetry, appreciation for conducting workshops for college students. She has already authored several research papers, showcasing her talent and dedication to the field of research and writing. Aside from her professional pursuits, Eshanpreet is a tie-loathing adventurer who currently resides in Bangalore. She enjoys exploring and advancing in the field, always looking for new challenges and opportunities to learn and grow.

"The mark of a great city isn't how it treats its special places - everybody does that right - but how it treats its ordinary ones."

Aaron M. Renn

Life within boxes

Alefiya Vali
Columnist , The urban rhetoric

As I waited for her outside in the small cramped lobby filled with the utility items my mom gave me for my wedding I felt resigned. I wondered what my life had come to and if I could ever be okay with this lot life had dealt me. I was young, wasn't I? My life was not supposed to be like this, no one's life is! As if to find a testament to my situation I glanced through the doorway and let my eyes run over the small, stuffed but prim and proper room adjacent to the small bathroom outside which I waited. It got over even before it began and I saw the old man in the corner trying to tie his lungi, I immediately averted my eyes. That's not something I wanted to see, but then again there were so many things that were not supposed to happen. I had seen and heard too many bizarre things in the last two years, but now all this seemed too difficult to handle as if I had reached some breaking point.

I thought about the poem I came up with last night. That was dark, the poem I mean.

Well, giving in seemed easier sometimes. I heard the aldrop creaking and out came my only joy, my five-year-old daughter smiling, so pure and innocent. I wonder how she would do without a mother... I suddenly came back to my senses and stopped that train of thought! Of course, she needed me and I needed to stop fantasizing about ending this miserable existence but that was difficult to do with everything that had been happening of late.
I just could hope and work towards making sure that she would never face something like this, I thought as I dried her hair with a towel and helped her put on her uniform. Then we rushed down to the square so that she could catch her school bus on time.

Things were so amazing six years back, I had just got married and was promised a cosmopolitan urban life in Pune, but the pandemic changed everything, my husband - I wonder if I can even call him that now- lost his job and we had to shift back into his childhood home in these dirty

Mumbai suburbs, where even if you tried to gaze at the sky out of the small, louvered window, your gaze would be broken by clothes drying on the lines and you would end up looking into another house where the situation mirrored yours closely. I sighed. I plated the fried egg I was making and started on the chapati when I felt the old man's eyes burning a hole in my back, I readjusted my dupatta and continued cooking, disgusted and repulsed, thinking of the times when my husband did that and how it would spice up our lives but now there was no spark left, we were like an old married couple.

I made a beeline for the bathroom and washed up and got ready for the office. I tried to dwell on something happier as I boarded the bus and almost succeeded, then I entered the office with its numerous cubicles and I felt my heart sink again. I saw Anita and waved back to her, trying hard not to give in to the envy I felt- well I had just been to her house last weekend. She lived with her in-laws as well but they had a 2 bhk, and her father-in-law seemed so nice and cultured, fun to be around, and definitely not sleazy. Her husband and she were still in so much love despite being married for nine years and I could not help but be a little jealous. I had not had a moment alone with my husband for the last two years except when the old man went to meet his friends and then I would send my daughter off to play with her friends so that we could have some quality time. But it was not the same as earlier. Maybe it never would be.

I wonder when I became so claustrophobic, I pushed the bile down and tried to start work which was not very creative either, I felt so tied down in every aspect. I was tired and ready to give up, so resigned. Then I remembered, it was Saturday, a half day! I smiled. This was my best-kept secret, but I will tell you. Every alternate Saturday I would have to work for just half a day,

but no one at my place was privy to this information. As the clock struck 3 pm I went to the spacious washroom - well, relatively spacious- and put on some makeup, pulled my hair into a stylish updo, and walked down to this coffee shop on the adjacent street. Beautiful, luxurious, and air-conditioned, this space was my oasis. By now everyone here was familiar with my routine and I smiled as the barista asked me how I had been. I felt like royalty here and oh so free. I sat down in a corner with the latest romance novel by my favorite author and got easily caught up in the whirlwind romance between the characters as I sipped on the cold coffee I had ordered. That filled my weekly quota of romance.

Soon, it was time to leave but I felt better now, recharged, and rejuvenated, ready to face another two weeks of my life within the boxes. One day I would be free. One day I would figure things out. But, today I had to be nonchalant, I needed to be indifferent and I would be until I could.

Legs flapping wildly,
hands a flurry of movements,
eye trying to glimpse the sun.
The only savior,
the water keeps pulling into the depths,
deeper and deeper.
Now the breathing stops.
Limbs, limp flail around.
Silence of death engulfs the dark waters.

Suddenly a ray of light hits,
the eyes now closed,
reviving the will to survive.
A fresh struggle ensues,
between 'Will' and the tired body,
as the head resurfaces
soaked with golden light.
Just keep the head afloat says a voice,
Just keep the head afloat
Damnit!

'PLACES' to 'SPACES'- the paradoxical shift

Maria Akhtar
Founder,The urban rhetoric

Abstract

M Manuel Castells in the 'Rise of the Network Society' 1996, states that the overall majority of people in advanced or traditional societies, alike live in places, so they perceive their place as space-based. In history, this perception of space was a product of the socio-cultural beliefs of society. It was the symbolic content that translated the physical into the virtual realm, and places into space. This translation of 'place' into 'space', witnessed various paradoxes arising from changing philosophical and cultural contexts of the society, becoming paradigm on acceptance, and manifesting itself in the built environment.

This paper attempts to study the journey of such paradoxes into paradigms, through introspection of the architecture of the ancient world. The research shall chronologically reinterpret ancient architecture (particularly ancient Egypt), through the timeline, as a material expression of its culture. The paper shall conclude by identifying various cultural parameters, responsive in shaping the architectural expression of the past and hence proposing a scheme for reading architectural history in a cultural context.

This introspection of the journey of paradox to paradigm through history, shall impart humane perspectives for understanding the architecture of the Information Age, and also open fresh avenues towards historical interpretations and hence architecture education

Introduction

The Information Age is characterized by digitalization, computerization, and the rise of networks. This revolution has not just impacted jobs, the economy, and infrastructure but also changed the conception of human existence. Today we have more Facebook friends than real, conversations occur on social networks rather than cafes. In this backdrop of changing conception of human existence from real to virtual, how do we redefine architecture? How do we perceive physical space, when our existence is more virtual than physical? How do we design to address this duality of existence?

> **Keywords**:   Architectural history,
>   place, space, culture

Historical narratives

What makes historic architecture aweinspiring. Why are historic buildings still a major landmark of the built fabric, and an essence of the society? Why do people still visit such places, despite it being functionally obsolete? What is that after centuries of its construction and use, it still leaves a mark on the heart of the visitor. What inspired the people back then, was to put their sweat and blood into the creation of such monumental structures. What makes such structures constant in this exponentially dynamic world?

The answer lies in the quality of space that has rendered historic architecture timeless. This timelessness is achieved through the design and meaning of the built form, which still makes them relevant and vital to the people. This timeless quality can only be understood, when architecture is seen as a cultural artifact, and architectural history as a manifestation of its culture. Architecture is not just about beautiful buildings, but it is a social act. The major objective of architecture remains to reflect the socio-cultural belief of the society through symbolism in form. Hence it can be said that appreciating architecture is not just about admiring the beauty, aesthetics, geometry, or monumentality, but it is about absorbing the emotions it conveys, in its experience and expression. One of the major objectives of this paper is to change the perception of architecture from a built form of enduring value to a container of human emotions.

Duality of existence

Human existence is a product of time and space and its essence lies in the chemistry between body and mind. The body exists in the physical realm i.e. "place". The 'place' can be defined as the physical envelope surrounding a person, the behavioral space, in which he exists and acts.

Whereas the intangible mind exists in a virtual envelope, perceived in the mind of a person, i.e. the virtual realm or 'space'. Hence the notion of existence rests on this duality. We are physically present in a place, but also virtually exist in space, where our existence is representational and not literal. A devotee on the gate of the Golden temple, Amritsar does connect to the beauty of the gold tomb and lake but the glory of The tomb transports him on a more divine platform, close to the religious leader buried inside. Hence, the physical realm (place), is transported into the sacred realm (space), through the layer of cultural values, which are manifested through the symbolism of the built form. Architectural history provides rich evidence, of this interconnection of 'place' and 'space'. The spatial design of historic monuments provides a strong sense of place, yet artfully transports the viewer to the desired 'space'.

Sense of 'Place'

The conventional parameters of studying architectural history mainly rely on physical parameters like geography, geology, climate, site, material, construction technique, etc. These factors contribute to the built form in terms of material, construction, profile, and detail. Hence, they mark the nature of the existence of the structure on the urban fabric, in the most appropriate way possible. The details of the built form, governed by these parameters, impart it a unique character, embedding a 'sense of place', in the eyes of the visitor.

The visitor undoubtedly and very promptly relates to the physical realm or 'place' around him by responding to its structure and character. We still admire the monumentality of the pyramids, the unraveling scale of the structure, and the materiality of the stone blocks, profoundly sitting on the sands of Egypt. The mystery behind the geometrical excellence of the monument is still unsolved. They are admired and acknowledged as one of the ancient wonders of the world.

Sense of 'Space'

What did Pyramids mean to the kings buried within? Why did hundreds of workers selflessly invest their lives in constructing a tomb as monumental as the pyramids? Pyramids, in the contemporary context, are regarded as 'architectural marvels'. But back then, in 3000 BCE, they meant much more to the people, than just a 'marvel' or a 'monumental tomb'.

As discussed in the earlier section, the pyramids are appreciated for their exactness, massive size and scale, their building skills, refinement in the sculpture of the sphinx, the dedication of workers lifting so many heavy sites on the construction site, and so on. However, this material excellence is guarded by a strong belief system. The smooth transition of the king's spirit 'ka' to the afterlife to meet 'Ra', assured prosperity and fertility in Egypt. The pyramids were built the way they were, only to facilitate the safe journey of 'Ka' to 'Ra'. The spirit of the king after death would transcend up, to meet 'Ra', through the convergent tip of the pyramid. 'Ka' and 'Ra' would become one whole, at the gold apex of the pyramid. The prosperous afterlife of the king assured the afterlife of the entire kingdom. It was this urge for eternity that inspired people to put their heart and soul into the construction of the pyramid. They were metaphorically constructing their own afterlife. The dual existence of an individual is a factor of time and space, which overlaps with people and beliefs. The physical realm 'place', where the visitor exists relates him to the monumentality, scale, and beauty of the pyramid. Whereas its spatial quality transports the visitor into a sacred realm i.e. 'space', where he relates to the beholding of the eternity. It is this duality of space, which results in a complete architectural experience, and renders a structure timeless.

Spatial renderings

As discussed earlier, reading architectural history in view of physical determinants, only helps in mapping the 'place', whereas understanding the same place in a backdrop of the socio-cultural and philosophical context of the people and society, helps to perceive the 'space' in 'place'. 'Place', then becomes the physical realm, which can be seen, felt, and experienced. Whereas 'space' depends upon the individual's cognition of the place.

Learnings from the past for the future

Historic architecture can be holistically understood as an interplay of space and time, and a product of people and belief. It is the interplay of these factors, which gives meaning and expression to the built environment.

Quest for timelessness

History stands as a witness, to the duality of existence, and hence duality in built form. The journey of 'place' to 'space', and profane to sacred can be clearly traced from historical perceptions and interpretations. History should be admired not just for its monumentality and scale, but for the cultural value and ideas it manifests in its expression. The objective of proposing a fresh perspective towards looking at the architecture of the past is to capture the essence of the place and hence the concept of space in the present context.

Therefore, the approaches to study and interpret architecture history, to understand its timelessness is as follows

1. Characters of architecture

Architecture is like a theatre, which stages different socio-cultural activities of its time. Like theatre, the architectural language so developed depends upon the nature of its characters. The characters in architectural history, which shape the built environment may be stated as Geography, Art of Writing, Sculpture, Image of the god, Role of the king, Conception of death, and Cosmogony. Architecture is a representation of the spirit of these characters. It is these characters that majorly influenced the architecture of the past and shaped the total setting of architectural production. Apart from specialized talent and technology, architecture is an outcome of the teamwork of these characters, which function as a family.

2. Expression of architecture

The tangible presence of a building is an expression of the intangible culture. The physical integrity of a building ensured by its structure, construction, material, technology, stands witness to the culture and belief system of the society. The physical form of a building not only conveys expertise in technology, material, and skill, but also functions as a narrative of the society, and symbolizes conceptions of its time. The basic purpose of architecture is to house a function, but its beauty lies in how well the meaning of function (ritual) is conveyed to the observer.

For ex., as discussed earlier the pyramids are still appreciated for their design excellence. However, this excellence is guarded by a strong belief system. The hope of smooth transition of the spirit of the dead king to Ra, the faith that king and Ra together would bless people with prosperity, the aspiration to maintain the continuity as perceived in cosmogony (ma 'at).).

Without understanding the real meaning of the pyramid as an assurance of a good afterlife for the people, study of the pyramid would be equivalent to the study of any other royal tomb.

The expression of architecture lies in its meaning. Architecture is a cultural artifact, a reflection of society, and a container of human values. Architecture is given meaning through visual imagery and symbolism, where signs symbolize these ideas. The true meaning of architecture can only be understood by the people of the time, who have held their worldview in the value system. Therefore, the primary step in understanding architectural history is seeing the monuments of the past, as symbols of their time, reflecting and strengthening the cultural beliefs of the society.

3. Democratic view towards architectural history

a. History of architecture is often imagined as the study of great monuments of the past, which speak about architectural innovation and excellence. Indeed, great monuments were ordered to be built by the rulers, royal treasury drained in construction, architects, and builders hired, to create monuments of grandeur. But humble structures like public buildings, domestic architecture, bazaars, gardens, and granaries also are a representation of the architecture of its time, where users were the designers. In fact, local and indigenous architecture portray honest cultural reflections. through design and use. The great monuments are shaped by the influence of humble structures surrounding them. For ex., a worker's tomb at Deir – elMedina, says as much of the conception of death as the great pyramids of Giza. Therefore, while studying architectural history structures of all scales and nature should be given equal importance.

b. The world is dotted with pieces of architecture, small and big, built by man. But while studying architectural history, it is only the style that contributed towards the development of world architecture, often termed as formal style, is noted worthy of study. Other styles i.e. non-formal style of architecture are left untouched. This approach deprives us of reading several such styles, which were marvels in themselves, and was a just representation of their culture. Therefore, while studying architectural history, all architecture of the world should be appreciated, and not just the ones capable of standing out through monumentality of its scale and fashion. We must have genuine respect for the architectural achievements of all cultures, irrespective of their origin. Architecture should be appreciated for its quality of being an expression of the cultures.

Architecture of 'Place' and 'Space' in the network society

Architecture is a social act and a result of complex cultural interplay which resides in the physical form. Physical constraints like geography, climate, economy, technology, etc. are modifiers of architectural form. Whereas the socio-cultural factors stated as characters of architecture, are determinants of the built form.

'Place' and 'Space'- Paradoxical Shifts

Times have changed, but man hasn't, rituals have changed but faith hasn't, 'place' has changed but the quest for 'space' hasn't. Hence, even in today's context, all we need is a place, that caters to this duality of existence and hence to pluralisms in meanings.

Indian manifestation of such a versatile space is the courtyard being bounded, yet open to the vast sky. A place having a singular identity, standard design, conveying a sense of uniformity. It strongly marks the sense of place, yet being so open-ended to adapt depending upon personal belief and value system. This versatility in design imparts a sense of personalized 'space', where an individual would exist as a part of the whole. Therefore, physical settings designed with such versatile and unique projections of 'space', provide the 'place' rich diversity and timelessness. Such places were meaningful in the past, and are still relevant in the present. Loss of identity and human interaction in the Information Age, governed by virtual rather than physical presence, defines the need for such versatile places even more. Such versatile places are capable of touching the human heart in divine ways, hence bringing back peace in dual existence.

Universal qualities of built form

Architecture has the power to communicate through spatial tools. It is this quality of space that decides its emotional impact on the visitor. A visitor may just pass by a structure, in the most neutral way, without realizing its existence, or may stop for a moment feeling connected to the place. Furthermore, the structure may touch the visitor emotionally, forcing him to stop, observe, contemplate and experience the space. Such is the power of architecture to evoke emotions and convey meaning through its spatial configuration.

In the context of the Information Age, where priceless conversations occur over social media rather than coffee, where we have more Facebook friends than real, all we need are spaces capable of touching the visitors emotionally. The most important spaces today, are the places where human interaction occurs. Such places should have the universal qualities to evoke the lost emotions amongst people, just by their spatial experience. The paper proposes the need for such humane and culture-centric perception towards the built form. Such timeless qualities of the built form shall render them appropriate in all ages and all contexts.

All we need is a fresh perspective towards looking at the Information Age. A humancentric approach exploring the power of architecture to communicate, evoke emotions, and touch lives. With passing time and dynamism in function, technology, material, ornamentation the architectural character and style of the building will evolve. But the spatial experience of a 'place', will always remain the key, irrespective of the time and context because 'space' operates on a human plane.

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The urban rhetoric

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An urban space quipped to handle residents and strangers alike and to make safety an asset in itself. A thriving city neighborhood must have three main qualities: First, there must be a clear boundary between what is public space and what is private space. Public and private spaces can not ooze into each other as they do typically in suburban settings or projects. Second, there must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the road. The buildings on an urban street should be equipped to handle strangers and ensure the safety of both residents and strangers. They must be oriented to the street. They cannot turn their backs or blank sides on it and leave it blind. Third, public spaces must have users on them reasonably continuously, both to add to the number of effective panopticons and to induce the people in buildings surrounding the space to perform as active characters responsible for the safety of the space.

A tight urban space ensures a successful public life and high living standards. Equity ensures that every person, irrespective of race, caste, creed, or religion, gets an equal opportunity for growth and success. Such efforts must permit explicit discussions on race and equity with clear communications and a platform for everyone to raise their concerns and present their needs and ideas. A platform that is transparent, accountable, and fosters relationships. Social cohesion can be achieved if governments can understand the needs of their citizens by establishing special departments in the neighborhood that promote citizen and community engagement. This department, led by cultural officers, should aim to bridge the gap between the bottom-up and top-down approaches by fostering connections/relationships between the place and the people that live in it. Community engagement must ensure that the people are comfortable with engaging, feel safe, and develop trust towards the cultural offices. To achieve this, the approach cannot be short-lived or temporary. The approach must transform into a social movement that can leverage civic power and collective action to transform policies. The urban Rhetoric, through its sixth issue, due for publication in March 2023, aims to foster a platform to discuss the urban space, its actors, and qualities that make it successful, such as safety, equity, and social cohesion. We invite you to write for our upcoming issue and join the dialogue.

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